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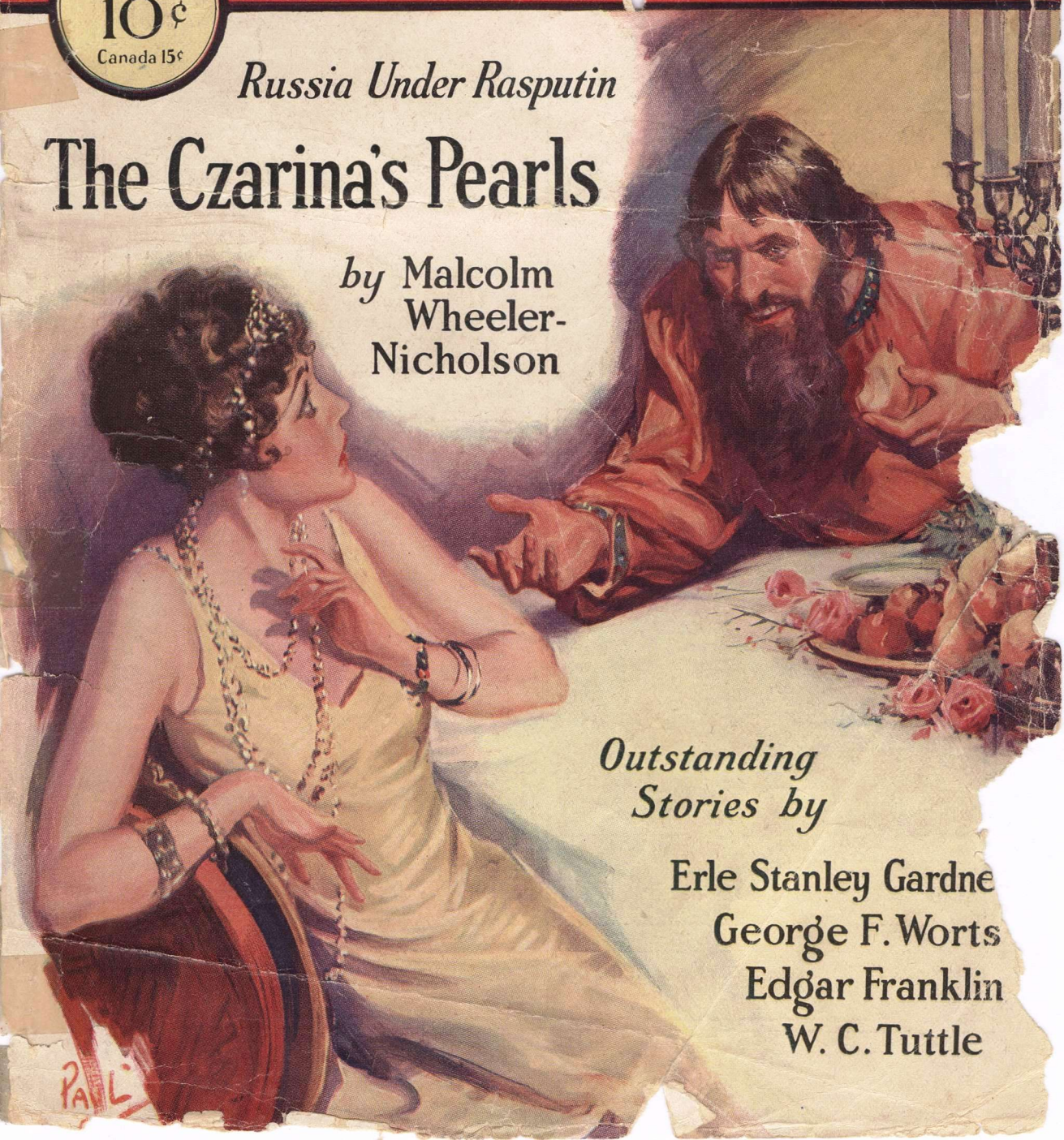
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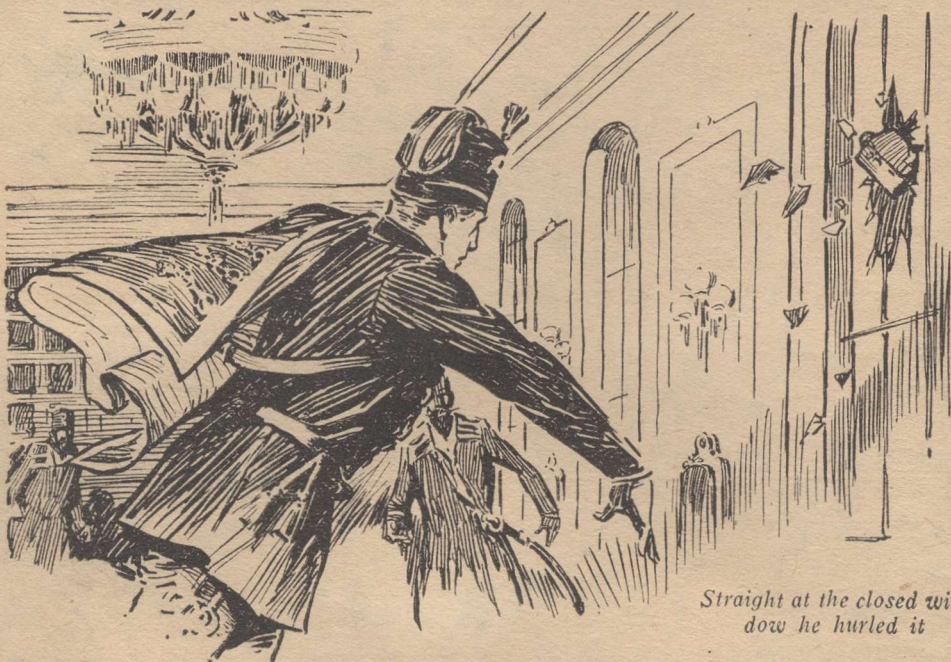
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VOLUME 213

SATURDAY, JULY 19, 1930

NUMBER 6



Straight at the closed window he hurled it

The Czarina's Pearls

Fierce passions and devious intrigues were undermining the Russian court in the days just before the war, when Rasputin was the real ruler—and American-trained Lieutenant Prince Michael found it a curious and deadly place

By MALCOLM WHEELER-NICHOLSON

Author of "The Baldassare Ruby," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A DOOM IS PRONOUNCED.

IT was a quiet little supper, that winter evening early in 1914. But, like a pebble cast into a still pool, the waves of that supper traveled far, and were noted at widely scattered points.

Among other places they penetrated into the secret bureaus of a building in Berlin, into the quiet chambers of a chancellery in Vienna, and into the upper rooms of a certain unassuming Downing Street house in London.

The Villa Rode in St. Petersburg lent itself to quiet suppers, having, as it

did, a number of discreet little private dining rooms where almost anything might happen and often did.

There were three of them around that table, the most noticeable being a burning-eyed, fanatic-looking, tall, thin figure in peasant costume with silk embroidered shirt. He had a thatch of unruly hair, a tangled black beard and flowing mustache. It could be none other than Rasputin himself.

Next him sat a fleshy, blue-black jowled man dressed in the green and silver of an officer of the Imperial Suite, a deep-voiced and hearty fellow whose eyes were just a shade shift and frightened-looking.

The third member, a stolid, blockily-built personage, glanced at the other two from time to time, with something like contempt peering forth from his small, hard blue eyes; eyes that stared forth humorless and arrogant from a bullet-shaped head surmounted with a brush of stiff and pompadourish hair.

"So far it is nothing but talk, talk, talk," spoke up this last one, his Russian sounding strangely harsh and guttural. "Germany does not want talk, it demands proof. Where is the proof?" The arrogant one struck the table with his clenched fist so that the other two looked at him, worried.

The fat one in the green and silver of the Imperial Suite leaned forward, licking his lips nervously. "Your excellency forgets that so far the proceedings have been interfered with by an almost diabolic series of happenings—"

"It is true," the man in the peasant boots and blouse spoke up in a deep and resonant voice, "the hand of God seems to be against us."

"You Russians!" and there was contempt in the harsh voice of the stocky, stiff-haired one. "You Rus-

sians! Whenever your own incapacity becomes too evident, you blame it on the hand of God. Who is working against you? Who has upset your plans? Kill him without mercy!"

The other two looked at each other, startled. Finally they nodded to each other.

"He has been drawn against us by accident and by the influence of the Czarina's newest lady-in-waiting, Natalia Feodorovna," the imperial officer said. "She is the one who had charge of the pearls."

"Kill her, too," spoke up the blocky man brutally.

Both his listeners shook their heads.

"No, it will not be necessary, the Okhrana can handle Natalia's case," and it was noticeable that when the imperial officer mentioned the name of the dread Russian Secret Service he lowered his voice and glanced about.

"It is Prince Michael who must die," he continued.

"Yes," echoed the bearded man in the Russian peasant costume. "And Natalia, the little vixen, must have her pride humbled. Leave it to Grishka. She shall be taught humility," and his deep-socketed eyes glowed savagely.

For Rasputin himself, the most powerful individual at the Russian court, had been flouted and tricked.

It had all started a few days before when a certain lieutenant went on duty as officer of the Palace Guard.

CHAPTER II.

THE IMPERIAL BODYGUARD.

OVER St. Peterburg a lead-colored sky pressed down like a heavy blanket. The Neva was frozen solid and exhaled an icy chill toward the huge, frowning bulk of the Winter

Palace sprawled along its bank. The Czar and his family were at home, as could be seen by the huge imperial standard rippling lazily from the tower.

In a large hall within the palace stood a tall young lieutenant of Red Hussars, a broad-shouldered, slender-waisted figure in scarlet dolman and gold-embroidered *pelisse*. There was a suggestion of restrained and smoothly functioning power about him, like the strength of a giant jungle cat.

His tawny, sleepy, wide-apart eyes stared curiously aloft at the enormous bronze and crystal chandeliers, then gazed along the hall through the arched entrance to another hall and still another at the end of which he could see the silent cat-like pacing figures of the Cossacks before the heavy door of the inner apartments, the dwelling place of the Czar.

Lieutenant Prince Michael Doblestni had absolute responsibility for the safety of the Czar's person for the next twenty-four hours, no light responsibility in view of the fact that attempts had been made on the ruler's life no less than three times in the last year.

No sound disturbed the silence of the palace except an occasional subdued cough, or the whisper of some one of the many footmen in crimson coats and knee breeches.

He studied his men, lithe tall fellows, booted and spurred, their sabers at the carry, the long scarlet saber knots swinging as they paced their posts gravely and quietly.

Enigmas to him were these Russian soldiers, stolid respectful fellows. He knew soldiers and loved them and had spent many happy years in their company. But those were the lank, loose-jointed men of his uncle's American cavalry regiment. With this uncle, the brother of his American mother, he

had spent many happy vacations, riding and marching along the Mexican border.

He smiled. "Mike," the American soldiers had called him; while these sternly respectful men never addressed him except as "*Vashe Blagorodie*"—"Your Honor." Undoubtedly the Russian cavalry regiment was more colorful, but he missed the American cavalrymen's humanness and humor.

THE early darkness of midwinter came on. Dim lights sprang out of the shadows here and there. It was his first tour of guard duty there and he was rather overwhelmed with the seriousness of it. Should any one enter through his sentinels and harm any of the imperial family, the Russian officer's code left only one course of atonement open: he must take his own life.

The whole great gloomy palace seemed to be listening and watching, with its pad of silent feet and its whispers.

Dawn was heralded by the arrival of the cleaners, red-trousered, white-shirted men, a long line of them advancing over the floors, working industriously and silently.

A trace of his Slavic ancestry remained in young Prince Michael, a form of superstition for which he laughed at himself but which he invariably heeded. He always started the day by counting anything that appeared in numbers over five. If the score came out seven or eleven or any multiple of those numbers he felt that the day was begun under good auspices.

He counted the cleaners, breathing a sigh of relief as he totaled their number to twenty-one. He wondered how dependable these cleaners might be. He knew that it was the custom of the

Czar to walk through these halls at eight o'clock, on his way out for a walk. What could prevent one of these cleaners from smuggling in a bomb or a revolver and making an attempt on the life of the ruler?

Then the lieutenant shook his head, smiling at his own state of nerves.

It was nearing eight o'clock. A stir and rustle in the halls between his hall and the inner apartments betokened the expected passage of the Czar. The red-trouserred cleaners came back, carrying their mops and buckets.

Idly, wishing to verify his chances for the day again, the young officer counted them. Startled, he sat bolt upright in his chair and rubbed his eyes, rapidly counting them over a second time.

There were only twenty of them! One was missing, left behind in the inner hallway through which the Czar would come any moment now!

THE lieutenant paused, a horrible fear gripping his heart. It was his first tour of guard duty. There were many guards on duty in the two great halls which separated him from the inner apartments. Surely it would be looked upon as impertinence on his part if he rushed in and demanded a search of those two halls.

There was a stir and bustle about the doors leading to the Czar's private quarters. A file of Cossacks had ranged themselves on either side.

For a second a struggle went on between his more fatalistic Slav ancestry and his more dynamic American blood.

The American in him triumphed. Calling his orderly, he strode rapidly toward the inner apartments.

Several Cossack sentinels looked at him in surprise. There was nothing in that hall behind which a man could

remain in concealment. Into the next he went.

The bustle about the door of the Czar's suite continued.

The second hall contained several great pieces of bronze statuary, one of which, an equestrian figure, flanked the entrance nearest to the door at the Czar's chambers. Like a hound on the quest, the Hussar officer went for this.

Cowering behind it, with some dark object in his hand, crouched the form of the missing cleaner.

As the lieutenant rounded the base of the statue the man rose, his eyes ablaze with fanatic resolve, his two hands around the dark object. With this he did something, drew forth a pin or adjusted it in some fashion and, leaning backward, threw it at the scarlet-clad officer before him.

The lieutenant of Hussars dodged the missile which was whirring strangely. Then with the speed of thought he leaped for the thing, a cubical box in some dark metal, and grasping it, ran across the slippery floor toward the nearest window.

The thing in his hands continued to whirl. As he ran he gazed at it fascinated, wondering what second it was going to explode and blot him out.

He was within five yards of the window now. The thing in his hand stopped whirring and clicked suggestively, once and again. With all his force he threw it, heaving it straight at the closed window.

The heavy small iron box left his hand, described an arc, struck the windowpane and splintered it, passing through.

A sudden rumbling roar from outside announced the explosion of the infernal machine. Splintered glass flew about the hall.

Turning swiftly, the lieutenant

shouted and pointed at the man behind the statue.

One of the tall Cossacks ran with drawn sword, leaping like a cat on the cleaner. There was the hungry flick of a blade, a stifled moan and the assassin sank down, coughing blood.

THE hall suddenly filled with men. Officers and soldiers of the guard appeared as if by magic. A great shouting and hubbub arose. It was stilled by a commanding voice.

"*Smeer'na!* Attention!" shouted a huge, red-clad Cossack, straightening the black Persian lamb skin cap on his head and freezing into immobility.

The silence of the tomb succeeded the hubbub that had taken place.

A short, bearded man, wearing the uniform of the Preobajensky Guard Regiment with his cap set on one side of his head rather jauntily, stepped forward and asked a question, looking sadly at the body of the cleaner.

Men pointed at the lieutenant, standing stiffly on the outskirts of the crowd.

"What has happened here?" asked the bearded man, his eyes gazing in kindly fashion into the face of the Hussar officer.

The lieutenant wildly tried to remember the ritual of a guard officer's reply to the Czar.

"In the guard and on the posts of your imperial majesty—" he stuttered.

"Yes, yes," the voice of the bearded man interrupted, "what happened?"

Prince Michael told his story in as few words as possible, still not sure that he had not transgressed all the laws of the palace guard.

"But that was splendidly heroic!" The bearded man turned toward the tall Grand Duke at his side.

"Splendid, your majesty!" echoed the Grand Duke, an uncle of the Czar.

"And your name?" The Czar turned again to the lieutenant.

"Lieutenant Prince Michael Doblestni, of the your imperial majesty's regiment of Hussars of the Imperial Bodyguard," returned the lieutenant.

"Oh, you are the officer who has been so much in America?" The Czar looked at him kindly. "You have done a courageous thing this day." Suddenly it came over the Hussar officer that living or dying meant very little to this gentle-mannered ruler of Russia, that he was honestly more interested in the proof of courage on the part of one of the officers of his guard than he was in his own narrow escape from death.

"You have done a splendid thing, and it shall not be forgotten," said the Czar, and turned away.

Nor was it. After a needed afternoon's sleep, he went to the quarters of his regiment, to be greeted by a great ovation. Dinner had advanced not over half an hour when a Cossack officer of the guard was introduced and bowed low to the lieutenant.

"Her imperial majesty sends her grateful thanks to Lieutenant Prince Doblestni and requests the pleasure of his company at dinner at eight o'clock this evening."

CHAPTER III.

I RASPUTIN.

THERE was very little time to lose. Accompanied by the Cossack guard officer, Prince Michael, clad in the scarlet and gold of the Red Hussars, drove rapidly to the Winter Palace.

At the far end of the great salon, standing near an open fire, was the Czar. Seated near him, her gray eyes

kindling with a welcome, sat the Czarina, tall and stately and beautiful. A fresh-cheeked girl, whose merry eyes belied the stateliness of her carriage, was the Grand Duchess Tatiana.

Bowing low over the hand of the Czarina, Michael heard her murmur some words of praise and rose to find the eyes of Nicholas fixed on him in kindly fashion. Greetings being exchanged, he was introduced for the first time to another member of the party, a slim, dark-haired girl with clear eyes and a sensitive, beautiful face alive with vitality and a sort of suppressed eagerness.

There was something challenging and at the same time deeply friendly about her eyes, so clear, frank and understanding, that his pulse drummed in his ears.

It was the new lady-in-waiting to the Czarina, Natalia Feodorovna Goldouriki, the daughter of Prince Feodor. So dazed and thrilled was Michael with the beauty and charm of the girl that it was not until later that he noticed the really remarkable rope of pearls she wore, a huge triple strand of perfect jewels.

He marveled as he finally looked at them, so beautiful were they, the sheen of each pearl tinged with a faint glow of pink, like a lucent globe of solidified mist bathed in the warm rays of the setting sun. It seemed fitting that the beautiful rope of pearls should so sinuously adapt itself to the curves of her slender figure, glowing against the satin whiteness of neck and bosom, following the curved loveliness of her breast and dropping almost halfway to the tapering gracefulness of her dainty feet and ankles.

As they rose to enter the dining room, an *aide-de-camp* of the Czar joined them, a Captain Barjensky. The

dark green and silver of his uniform fitted loosely over his somewhat too evident curves. He was one of those big men whose weight quivers on them like jelly, whose jowls are always blue-black. He had a deep and hearty voice that lacked very little of being convincing.

The girl Natalia frowned a little when he entered and kept a carefully averted face when he talked, as he did almost constantly.

"THOSE are beautiful pearls you are wearing, Natalia Feodorovna," whispered the Hussar lieutenant to the girl at his side.

"Yes," she agreed in a low tone, and her voice was a delight to the ear, low and with a musical throb to it. "They are her majesty's. I wear them to keep them in health. They are beautiful, but oh, so heavy; and they mean so much responsibility!" Her tone expressed weariness.

"Keep them in health?" Michael looked puzzled.

"Yes," whispered the girl. "You know that pearls 'die' when they are worn by some people and unfortunately her imperial majesty is of the type who cannot wear them for any length of time. Only on rare occasions does she wear them. Immediately afterward they begin to grow pale and it is necessary that they be worn by some one else who can make them recover."

"His majesty tells me that you have been long in America," the voice of the Czarina came to the ears of Michael Petrovich.

"Yes, your imperial majesty, with my uncle, a colonel of cavalry."

"And what do you think of the American cavalry?" asked the Czar.

"They ride and shoot amazingly well, your imperial majesty."

"Better than my regiments?" asked the Czar, his face showing interest.

"I think they are better practiced in dismounted firing with the rifle."

A quick look of disapproval flashed from Captain Barjensky's eyes and he said: "It would be impossible for any cavalry in the world to shoot better than the regiments of your majesty's army."

Prince Michael flushed a dull red, realizing that he had made a *faux pas* and angry that this fat captain had taken it up so quickly.

"It is so difficult to get at the truth when one is Czar," Nicholas said quietly, and cast a kindly glance toward Michael.

There was a murmured word at the outer door, then a deep, vibrant voice boomed out a greeting.

"It is Grigori!" exclaimed the empress, clasping her hands and staring earnestly at the door. The Czar nodded absently. The Grand Duchess Tatiana frowned. Natalia shuddered a little and lowered her head. The stout aide-de-camp, Captain Barjensky, rose respectfully.

A man of strange appearance stepped into the room. He was tall and thin. His black hair descended in curly ringlets to his shoulders, great burning eyes stared out of an abnormally pale, unhealthy-looking face half covered by a tangled black beard and flowing mustache.

He was dressed in a white, silk embroidered shirt, worn after the Russian fashion, long, dark velvet trousers and soft peasant shoes. The man radiated a queer, hypnotic power, so that his presence in the room affected every person in it. Michael felt his attention fixed on the newcomer sharply, as though he were attracted by some powerful magnet.

"Rasputin!" whispered Natalia to him, and there was a world of fear and dread in her tone.

MICHAEL had heard much of this strange character and none of it good. According to the gossip of the mess, he was an adventurer of the worst type, who by the exercise of hypnotic power and some healing ability had gained an ascendancy over the Czar and especially the Czarina, through his seemingly marvelous ability at keeping the young Czarevitch Alexei in health. There were other rumors, about the Czarina, which no one spoke aloud.

Grigori Efimovitch Rasputin, originally a horse boy and then an itinerant *starets* or wandering holy man, had come from Siberia. No one knew much about him. Some said that he was in reality a gifted man of God, others that he was an incarnation of the Anti-Christ. There was no denying that the Czar and Czarina were as wax in his hands.

"You have seen Alexei to-day? He looks better?" the Czarina leaned forward anxiously, staring at the strange Rasputin as though he held the keys of heaven and hell themselves.

"Fear nothing, Alexandra Feodorovna," the voice of Rasputin boomed forth like the tolling of a bell, "so long as I am with thee, no harm shall come to the little Alexei. Grishka can save, Grishka can cure, Grishka can bring peace."

He used the familiar form of salutation, the "thou" of the second person singular. It went unnoticed by all save Michael Petrovich who looked with astonishment on this coarse peasant monk with his thick bright red lips and penetrating eyes, this man of whom so much evil was spoken that

it was feared that he would drag down the imperial family and end the rule of the Czar over Russia. Without further greeting Rasputin sat down at the table, and wolfed a pear.

For a moment the young officer felt the piercing regard of this strange Rasputin probe deep into his soul. It was as though his secret and inmost thoughts were turned upward for this man to gaze upon.

"Oho!" said Rasputin, "so here is the brave little officer who risked his life for the Czar. You will go high, young man, but not without Grishka. You will plan, Grishka will change."

When the uncouth monk removed his eyes from Michael's, it seemed as if the beam of a powerful and blinding searchlight had been suddenly shifted. His gaze was now fixed on Natalia, at Michael's side.

"And here is my frightened little pigeon again," the monk exclaimed, "the little pigeon who will never look into Grishka's eyes. Look at me, my dear, and find peace as so many of your friends have found it."

But Natalia continued to keep her head bent, and her eyes fixed on her plate. Her face was pale and she trembled a little in dread and horror. Suddenly Michael felt a great surge of anger against this uncouth peasant, and a great wave of desire to protect this girl against the so-called holy man.

"Is it compatible with your alleged state of holiness to show so much interest in young girls?" Michael said softly, and looked squarely into the queer eyes of the monk.

to believe his ears, smiled maliciously and nodded his head. Natalia raised her head quickly and shot a glance full of warning at Michael.

"Ho, ho, ho!" Rasputin leaned back and stretched his legs, laughing with all the abandon of a drunken peasant. "Our little hero is a fighting cock. We will cure him of that. We will teach him to appreciate Grishka's holiness." He gave a sidelong glance at Michael that was less a threat than a calm announcement of retribution to come.

A constraint fell upon the table. Michael Petrovich cursed himself for having let his tongue get away with him. He had made a powerful enemy, right at the Czar's table, and at the outset of his career. Rasputin stared at the ceiling as though he had already forgotten the incident. But from tales he had heard, Michael was under no delusion as to Rasputin's powers of forgetfulness.

During the remainder of the evening he was ignored by all save Natalia.

"When shall I see you again?" he whispered as he was taking his leave.

"You will be at the ball next Wednesday?" she answered quite simply.

"Yes."

"We will meet there," she said, then a look of something like anxiety came into her eyes. "Be on your guard against Rasputin," she whispered.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CZAR'S BALL.

A GREAT silence fell on the table. The Czarina nervously clenched her fingers. The Czar looked up, mildly worried. Captain Baryensky, after staring as though unable

ON Wednesday night Michael drove up to the Jordansky entrance of the Winter Palace, a rich, high-collared fur coat covering his scarlet Hussar uniform.

A stream of brilliantly uniformed officers flowed toward the great staircase above, from which could be heard the stirring notes of a military band. The court costumes of the ladies, shimmering in silks and glittering with jewels, made an effective background for this spread of color.

Michael drifted along with the crowd, bowing here and there to officer friends. Gazing about the great ball-room his eyes sought through the enormous scene for some sight of Natalia's dark hair and slim figure.

It was a bewildering scene, made more brilliant by the great mirrors which doubled the vastness of the halls. The mirrors reflected the sheen of marble, the gleam of thousands of lights, the shimmer and sparkle of jewels and the glitter of the gold and silver of the officers' uniforms.

Suddenly there was a hush as black-coated, gold-chained masters of ceremonies tapped on the floor with slender ivory wands, forming an alleyway through the great crowd.

From the bandstand came the majestic flowing notes of a march. Down the alleyway, the Czarina on his arm, came the Czar, in the uniform of the Ismailoffsky Regiment of the Guards.

Following them came foreign ambassadors and their wives, grand dukes and grand duchesses, and admirals and generals. It was a brilliant group as it came finally to rest and the dancing started, with a waltz.

In that great crush trying to find any individual was like hunting for a needle in a haystack. But Michael persevered until at last he saw her, superbly slim and graceful in a cream-colored ball dress which set off her figure proudly. She was talking to some old dowager covered with jewels when Michael approached and leaned over her hand.

At last they were in the Pompey gallery, where the crush was less.

AS he gazed at the fresh loveliness of her, a great rage against Rasputin rose in his heart, an anger against the elderly, dirty-bearded *muzhik* whose power was so formidable.

"I am grateful to you," she said hesitantly "for your reprimand to Grigori Rasputin the other night. But you must not risk yourself against him. Sometimes I think he is more powerful than the Czar himself!"

The solicitude in her voice set Michael's blood to hammering in his ears. "I fear for you, Natalia Feodorovna," he lowered his voice and bent over her. "Tell me, are you in great danger from him?"

She nodded, a sudden flicker of dread showing in her eyes for a second, then raised her head proudly.

"I would kill myself before I allowed that beast to touch me," she said very simply. Michael looked sideways at her tense, earnest face.

"Personally, I would far rather have you alive than dead," he remarked dryly.

And suddenly for no explicable reason, the two were smiling at each other. It was good to be young and handsome and beautifully dressed, a guest at the emperor's palace with the music of a Viennese waltz throbbing a half delirious, half intoxicating undertone in the distance. For a moment, such is the natural resilience of youth and beauty, they forgot Rasputin and the evil which surrounded them and found joy in each other's nearness.

They had seated themselves on a divan on the far side of the statue. Voices coming from the other side, suddenly cut in on their gaiety.

"And you think it will come this summer?" a man's voice asked gravely.

"As sure as there is a God in heaven war will come this summer, your imperial highness. It is talked of openly in Berlin, it is known in the very cafés that the war plans of the General Staff are perfected to the smallest detail."

Natalia shivered, and again there crept into her eyes that frightened, strained expression.

"Oh, they're always talking war," murmured Michael reassuringly.

Natalia raised her head suddenly, her eyes tragic, her hand went to her throat, she started to say something, then shook her head and was silent.

"What were you going to say?" asked Michael, his voice chaffing. "What load of sorrow is oppressing your young soul?"

"It is no laughing matter," she said simply and her eyes bore out the statement.

"*Prahsteets!* Pardon!" he said.

"It is nothing," she smiled a little sadly, "only I am so close to their majesties . . . A young girl should not know so much of horror and tragedy . . . And I can tell no one—I cannot even help!" She flung her hands outward in a helpless gesture, poignantly sad in its abject hopelessness.

"Natalia Feodorovna, will you accept me as a friend?" asked Michael.

"But surely."

"Won't you call upon me for help?"

"I cannot!" she moaned.

Michael said boldly: "Whatever it is, you must tell me instantly; I insist on aiding."

Having some of the average woman's liking for being bullied, and being overburdened with her heavy knowledge and helplessness, she took comfort at the assured note in his voice.

"There will be war this summer," she whispered, leaning forward, "war with Germany and Austria; and—and—" She plucked nervously at the string of pearls about her throat.

"Yes?" encouraged Michael.

"And Rasputin has sold himself and his influence to Germany!"

Michael looked at her gravely.

"Are you sure of this?" he asked.

"Absolutely."

The music of the military band came floating through the Pompey gallery playing some stirring march. Michael stiffened in his seat.

"I am glad you have confided in me," he said. "It may mean the lives of the men of my regiment, the lives of the men of many regiments." He stared into space, unseeing.

"But I need help, oh, I need help," she half moaned, nervously twisting and untwisting her fingers.

Michael reached forward, clasping the nervous hands in his own firm grip.

"I am here to help," he said, and patted her hands feeling an electric thrill transmit itself from the soft, tapering fingers. For a moment she allowed her hands to rest in his a glorious moment which made them both a little breathless, then she gently disengaged them.

CHAPTER V.

CHALLENGE.

"THE Czarina is a German princess, as you know," she said hurriedly as the soft color flooded her face. "The pearls that you saw me wearing the other night are hers, not part of the Russian crown jewels. Rasputin wants them."

"Rasputin wants the pearls of the Czarina? But why?"

"Yes, Rasputin has to have them," she leaned forward eagerly, her voice thrillingly low. "You see, he must show his power to the satisfaction of his employers in Berlin. They will not reward him or trust him fully until he has secured the pearls of the Czarina, as a gift. And—and—the Czarina is half inclined to give them . . . as a price for the health of Alexei." Natalia threw up her head proudly. "Her majesty is first and foremost the mother of her children, whatever the world may whisper!"

"I know that," Michael returned gently.

Natalia smiled at him in gratitude and went on.

"Once he has the pearls, it will do two things—prove to his German employers that he is worthy of their powerful support, and," her eyes clouded angrily, she clenched her hands, "prove to the Russian nation that he is the honored confidant and friend of the Czarina—and perhaps more."

Michael looked up sharply as the full implication dawned on him. The radical and revolutionary elements of Russia had gained enormous ground. What a weapon these pearls would put into their hands, should they appear around the greasy neck of Rasputin! What a powerful lever it would give the Reds to overturn the throne, with such proof added to the widespread whispers!

"Have you the pearls in your apartment at the palace now?" he shot at her so suddenly that she was startled.

"Yes."

"How much longer will you be wearing them for her majesty?"

"Perhaps two weeks."

"Is it possible for you to plead ill-

ness and go to your estates, taking the pearls with you?"

"Yes, I have taken them with me before."

Michael nodded, his eyes narrowed in thought. Suddenly he looked up.

"There is only one thing to do," he said calmly. "You must take them with you and go, immediately, tomorrow. And I—God help me—I must rob you of them and put them in hiding."

Natalia gazed at him white-faced. A slowly dawning admiration for the daring and the brilliancy of the scheme came into her eyes. Michael shrugged his shoulders absently.

"It is a duty," he said simply, "a duty for Czar and for Holy Mother Russia."

"WHAT is this that is a duty for Czar and Holy Mother Russia?" a sharp voice broke in on them. There, not three paces away stood Captain Barjensky, the stout *aide-de-camp* of the Czar gazing at the two of them with what could only be characterized as a particularly unpleasant smile upon his face.

But Michael Petrovich, after the first dizzying second of alarm, was more than equal to the occasion. He rose and bowed.

"The duty of which I spoke is the duty of an exceedingly beautiful lady-in-waiting to show kindness to an officer of his majesty's Hussars."

"Oho, I see." The unpleasantness of Captain Barjensky's smile was not diminished one whit, rather augmented. "What form, may I ask," and the sneer that lay under his words was too patent to be missed, "what form, may I ask, will this kindness take?"

"That question," said Michael very calmly advancing two paces, "merits

only one answer." So saying he raised his arm very swiftly and with the open palm of his hand slapped Captain Barjensky across the open mouth.

"Oh!" returned Barjensky, as calmly, and drawing forth his handkerchief daintily wiped at his face. Returning the handkerchief to his pocket, he bowed very formally.

"That leaves the situation in this wise," he said, and the self-control of the man was a marvelous thing to see: "that in addition to your duties to his imperial majesty and Holy Mother Russia, you have a third duty to perform."

"Quite so," nodded Michael, "a duty which I shall be very happy to discharge the moment you send your seconds to call upon me."

"Thank you, Prince Doblestni," said Barjensky, bowing very formally.

"At your service," Michael returned in French. Then as though the existence of the captain were forgotten, he turned to the pale statue in marble that was Natalia Feodorovna and offered her his arm. "Shall we go in to supper?" he asked.

As they walked sedately and quietly down the long Pompey gallery, Natalia looked up at Michael with fear in her eyes.

"Don't you see," she whispered, tightening her hold on his arm, "don't you see that that was done purposely?"

"No doubt," replied Michael.

CHAPTER VI.

RASPUTIN'S THREAT.

THE following afternoon Michael called on his mother at her apartment and found her proud at his new honors, but worried and anxious about the Rasputin affair. A gracious

white-haired lady, she had lived so long in Russia that she was nearly as much Russian as American.

"I have sent your father a message about the decoration; he will be pleased," she said.

Michael Petrovich shrugged his shoulders. "Precious lot he will care," he answered.

"In his way he cares very much," she said, her eyes troubled, "and I believe that he will be proud and happy. That your father and I get along so poorly does not alter the fact that you are his son and that as his son he is very proud of you."

Michael Petrovich thought of the trim, precise, rather cold-eyed retired colonel of Hussars, his father, and shook his head.

"After all, my son," she said gently, "it was much better that you did not marry that peasant girl, Maria Ivanovna."

"Granted," he said a little impatiently, "but there was no need of driving me from home with such bitterness. It was only a silly boy's first love."

"Yes, but you know how proud he is of his ancient family."

Again Michael shrugged his shoulders. It was not a subject that he cared to dwell upon. He had been seventeen and romantically absurd.

His mother's eyes clouded with anxiety.

"Your father's cousin, General Sabladoff, called me up to-day telling me to warn you that Rasputin meditated some evil against you. He said to beware especially of a Captain Barjensky."

"I know," nodded Michael. He had guessed as much; and he determined not to tell his mother of the approaching duel.

Taking his leave, he decided to walk

to his own quarters. The early darkness of winter had descended upon the city as he strode along, his hands deep in the pockets of his military overcoat, his head bent reflectively in his fur collar. It was not until he turned into a darker side street, a short cut to his own quarters, that he became aware of some one following him.

Ahead of him a few yards the street suddenly turned sharply at an angle of forty-five degrees. Once around the projecting corner he sped swiftly into the nearest shelter, a porter's lodge-gate. Here he stood silently, squeezing himself against the shadows and waited.

In another minute his pursuer rounded the corner, and stared down the empty street, nonplused. After a moment or two of searching examination, the man, a short, squat fellow, dressed like a petty tradesman, hurried on.

Michael followed cautiously on his trail, taking care to keep concealed. The fellow hastened on, stopping occasionally in puzzlement or in the hope that he might sight his quarry again, toward Michael's own quarters.

Near the entrance to the building Michael heard him whistle softly. Another figure detached itself from the shadows and the two conferred at length, watching the street narrowly as they talked. After a time they both nodded their heads and the first man started off again. The second man stood staring up at the unlighted windows of Michael's apartment.

Michael ducked past and followed the first man into a well-lighted street filled with automobile and *droshky* traffic and many pedestrians. After several blocks the fellow suddenly turned into a café called the "*Chorny Koshka*," the Black Cat, a restaurant

of the better class much frequented by officers.

Without a second's hesitation, Michael strode into the entrance and found himself in an inconspicuous waiting-place by the cloakroom door.

After about three or four minutes a waiter came out and nodded to the squat fellow who waited in the hall so impatiently. In another minute there came another figure through the doorway, a stout man in evening clothes, wiping his mouth with his napkin as he came along.

The two men conferred for a moment or two. The man in evening clothes looked impatient and annoyed. The other was evidently making excuses.

Finally the man in evening clothes turned back to his dinner. The other went swiftly out of the door and into the street.

Michael Petrovich strolled homeward very thoughtfully; for the man in evening clothes was stout Captain Barjensky of the Czar's staff.

AT his own quarters, Michael found no trace of the second spy. Lieutenant Drenadoff was awaiting him with a car and an invitation to dine at the Villa Rode.

Absent-mindedly Michael followed his friend and fellow officer into the famous restaurant.

Scarcely had the two seated themselves at the table when there was a great clatter and hubbub outside, accompanied by shouting and the sound of blows; then Rasputin, half drunk, teetered in with a beautiful young woman on his arm.

Loudly demanding wine, the drunken "holy man" ordered the gypsy orchestra to play one of his favorite airs. He rose unsteadily and advanced to the center of the floor where, all of a

sudden, he started to dance, leaping gracefully and easily and whirling about, keeping perfect time to the gypsy music with the stamp of his great boots. In his dancing he suddenly came to a stop before the table occupied by Michael and Drenadoff.

"Oh, ho!" shouted Rasputin drunkenly, "so here is the young fighting cock again! My little officer will have his spurs cut if he is not careful. Already has Grishka humbled one person to-day, the proud Natalia—"

Michael uncoiled like a steel spring and towered over the drunken *starets* threateningly. "You lie, you beast!" he stated, his eyes blazing wrathfully.

"No, no, Grishka does not lie. The beautiful Natalia Feodorovna will—"

Michael lunged forward, smashing with all his force full into the fleshy red lips. The tall peasant staggered for a second under the impact of the blow, then fell backward in an ignominious and startled heap.

The place was immediately filled with shouts and screams. The orchestra stopped playing suddenly. Waiters came running up, aiding the fallen Rasputin to his feet.

Michael Petrovich stood where he had delivered the blow, his fist clenched, his tawny eyes blazing with anger, his nostrils white.

Rasputin, helped up by the hands of the waiters, stood on his feet, blood flowing from his cut lips, his eyes red with anger.

"You have raised impious hands against a man of God," Rasputin shouted. "Long and terrible shall be your punishment!"

"Heed well what I say, Grigori Efimovitch!" Michael's voice flicked like a steel saber. "Let there be another move on your part to annoy her and I will kill you with my hands!"

2 A

There was a silence in the restaurant as he finished speaking and turned contemptuously on his heel.

At the door of his quarters, Shnit-skin, his orderly, met him.

"A woman to see your honor," announced the man.

CHAPTER VII.

WOMEN SPELL TROUBLE.

A WOMAN to see him? He stopped, surprised. It could not be his mother; she never visited him without invitation. He could think of only one woman who could possibly come. It must be Natalia Feodorovna with some important news. Suddenly he found his heart singing within him.

Entering the long hall quietly, he pushed aside the curtains of his drawing-room and stepped within. A girl stood against the table at the far end. His greeting died on his lips. For it was not Natalia Feodorovna who stood waiting for him.

The girl who smiled at him from the opposite end of the room was a peasant girl, dressed in her Sunday finery; her broad, rather pretty face and healthy skin could not disguise the fact that compared to Natalia she was like a cart horse alongside a racing thoroughbred. She was full of an animal vigor, but she had stubby, toil-roughened hands, she was lumpy and short, her coarse ankles and broad feet were clumsily shod in some product of the village shoemaker's art.

There was about her a half defiant, half uncertain air as she waited.

"Maria Ivanovna!" Michael tried to keep the displeasure from sounding in his voice. "What are you doing here in St. Petersburg?"

It was none other than the peasant girl from his village, the girl who had been the cause of his father's anger.

As Michael spoke there flashed through his mind a series of disconnected pictures: himself as an awkward youth, four years before; the village dance to the music of balalaikas and accordions; Maria Ivanovna, the village belle and himself, the son of the *barin*, strolling to kiss under the willows by the river; his father's discovery of the incipient affair, which resulted in Michael's being driven away to Cadet School.

"I am visiting my uncle," she answered. "And—I hoped that you had not forgotten your Masha." Again she looked at him with that cunning, half uncertain, half defiant air.

"But, Maria Ivanovna, you know our little friendship was nothing but a boy and girl affair and that it is best forgotten," he said kindly.

"Yes, I know," her eyes grew hard; "you are like all men, kiss and forget." She put her hands on her hips and raised her chin, shaking her head defiantly. Her voice grew more shrill: "A fine one you are, with your pretty uniform and your sword, to kiss a girl and win her heart and then go away and leave her!"

"**M**ARIA," Michael broke in quietly, "you are at least three years older than I am. When I was seventeen, in the village, you were at least twenty. You know as well as I know that a girl of twenty is far wiser than a boy of seventeen."

She flounced her shoulders angrily and sneered, "So you've turned into the preacher nowadays?"

There was a discreet cough outside and a shuffling of feet. Shnitskin appeared on the threshold.

"What is it?" called Michael.

"Your honor, there is a lady wishing to see you," said the orderly and Michael's mind subconsciously registered that in making known Maria Ivanovna's presence, his man had not used the word "lady."

"Who is she?" and Michael knew as he asked, who she was.

"She won't give her name, says she's got to see you right away."

Michael looked worried. How the mischief was he going to get rid of this Maria Ivanovna?

She settled the vexing question for him.

"I can make myself scarce," she said flippantly, "if that's what's upsetting you. Have you got a place I can sneak into?"

Without a word he pointed at the entrance to his bedroom which opened off the little salon. She picked up her hat and disappeared, closing the door after her.

It was Natalia Feodorovna, as he knew immediately despite the heavy veil she wore. She came in timorously, looking about her, her fingers twisting nervously. He seized both her hands in his, kissing them respectfully and waved her into a chair. She removed her veil and looked at him with eyes in which worry and deep trouble shone forth.

"I had to come," she said breathlessly. "I could not get in touch with you in time. There was no other way... I need help so!"

"I know, I know," soothed Michael, casting an anxious glance behind him at the entrance of his sleeping quarters. If only that infernal girl would stay there!

"Something has to be done immediately, to-night. Rasputin has talked the Czarina into giving him the pearls;

he has told her that the Czarevitch Alexei will suffer grave harm if she does not, and she has finally acceded. To-morrow evening at five o'clock he comes for them—and at six o'clock, as I know, he goes to the German Embassy!"

Michael drummed silently on the arms of the chair.

"To-morrow morning Drenadoff goes on duty at the palace. He will trade tours of duty with me. Will you have the pearls in your possession?"

"Yes, until she calls for them..."

"Then you will have to say that you have been robbed of them, and in the meantime you will have to turn them over to me at the palace."

Natalia looked frightened, then drawing her breath, nodded.

"It is the only way," she whispered,

looking at him anxiously, "but it is a fearful risk you run!"

Natalia sank back in her chair, looking about her for the first time since she had entered the apartment. Suddenly she stiffened in her chair and gazed past Michael toward the door of the sleeping chamber.

"Oh!" she said, then sat very primly in her chair, her face a mask.

Michael, not daring to look around heard a step behind him.

"Well, good-by, my dear," said the breezy voice of Maria Ivanovna. A stubby-fingered hand patted his cheek affectionately, and the peasant girl, her hair and her clothes very ostentatiously disarranged, went out of the door, her eyes gleaming with malice.

The door slammed and all was silent.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.



The Wood of the Flying Foxes

NEAR the village of Nukualofa, the capital of the Tonga Islands in the South Seas, is a tropical wood which is the haven for one of the pests to which the native Tongan is subject. In the daytime this wood presents an unusually weird scene, not because of swamps or hanging moss or the cries of water birds, but because of the hundreds of very large bats which hang from the branches of its trees.

These bats are so unusually large that the natives have called them foxes—"flying foxes." They are, of course, true bats, and not the flying foxes of America. They hang from the branches quietly for most of the day, but when night comes they fly away on raids over the island in search of fruit. So large are these bands of "flying foxes" that the amount of fruit they destroy on their raids is enormous. But the native Tongan is unable to protect his fruit trees from them or to destroy them. They have long been considered a sacred animal in the Tonga Islands, and being sacred they must not be killed. Like the rats which infest the greater number of South Sea Islands, these bats increase rapidly in numbers under such ideal conditions as tropical climate and tropical vegetation offer. Since they are sacred, the future offers no relief but rather more destruction by these weird fruit-hunting inhabitants of the sacred wood.

Raymond A. Wohlrabe.

A Year in a Day

Marked for death, men fell despite armies of guards—and the world was at the mercy of the malignant scientists who had conquered Time

By **ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

Author of "*The Sky's the Limit*," *the Whispering Tales*, etc.

Novelette—Complete



Ramsay's right hand seemed to vanish

CHAPTER I.

THE INVISIBLE DEATH.

OF the five men who sat in that palatial room, Carl Ramsay had the gift of dramatic expression. He thought in blurbs, talked in motion picture subtitles.

The hour of midnight chimed from the expensive clock on the mantelpiece. Somewhere a cuckoo clock sounded.

"A new day," said Carl Ramsay.

Tolliver Hemingway, multimillionaire, stirred uneasily.

"The day I am to die," he said, and forced a laugh.

Nick Searle of the *Star* scraped a match along the sole of his shoe and grunted.

"One chance in a thousand."

Inspector Hunter glowered about him, and his eyes were a challenge.

"One chance in ten thousand. One chance in a million," he said.

No one contradicted him, but Carl Ramsay of the *Clarion* uttered another subtitle.

"The Death Day Dawns," he murmured.

Arthur Swift surveyed the men in the room with curious eyes. It was his first experience with men of this type.

locked room. Every bit of food they were to eat during that time had been hermetically sealed in cans. It would be consumed immediately after the cans were opened. Every bit of



Inspector Harrison Hunter, forceful, driving, alert; Tolliver Hemingway, multimillionaire, suave, polished, dignified, yet somewhat nervous beneath the external polish; Nick Searle, veteran reporter of the *Star*; Carl Ramsay, of the *Clarion*, who had been aptly described as "the man with the tabloid mind"; and, himself, a young teacher of physics in the State university. It had been Searle who had called him in, to cover the case for the *Star* from a scientific angle.

Yet Swift could see nothing to cover.

The room was locked, guarded. The five men were to keep a constant vigil for twenty-four hours within that

liquid they were to drink was contained in bottles that had been sealed and certified.

The room was on a third story. The windows opened out upon magnificent grounds, landscaped, cared for, and guarded. The side of the house was perfectly blank, devoid of any projection up which a man might climb. Searchlights played about the grounds. Floodlights illuminated the side of the building. A hundred armed deputies patrolled the place.

SUCH precautions seemed so elaborate as to be absurd. Under ordinary circumstances they would have been. But these were not ordinary.

Six of the richest men in the city had received letters on a single day. Those letters had been uniform in their terms. The men were to signify their willingness to pay a certain sum of money, which sum varied in each instance, or they were to die.

None of the men paid the slightest attention to those letters, save to turn them over to the police.

Then I. W. Steen, the millionaire head of a publishing company which included several magazines and two newspapers, one of which was the sensational *Clarion*, received a second letter.

That letter announced the day and the hour of his death in the event he did not comply with the request. Steen turned that letter over to the police and took precautions against attack.

The precautions were in vain.

Seated in his private office, in conference with the heads of his various publications, a sickening sweet odor became noticeable in the room. Ten seconds later Steen was dead. No other occupant of the room suffered the slightest inconvenience, the slightest sensation of discomfort, although all of them noticed the peculiar odor.

Two days later C. G. Haymes received a summons through the mail. It was in the nature of an ultimatum. He was to signify his willingness to comply with the terms of the man who signed himself "Zin Zandor," or he, too, was to die.

The hour of his death was not given. But the day of the death was announced.

C. G. Haymes had been frankly worried. He had placed himself in the hands of the police. They had isolated him in his home, surrounded the place with guards. He, too, had become good "copy," and the newspaper re-

porters who enjoyed the confidence of the administration had been permitted to cover the case. They had done it with an air of boredom. Steen's death had been due to fright, they felt; the autopsy disclosed no organic lesion. There was no chance that coincidence would repeat itself.

Yet, while the reporters were lounging about at ease, while the police cordon surrounded the place, while even the servants had been excluded, C. G. Haymes died, and the manner of his death was as the other's. A sickening sweet odor that had been noticed by the other occupants of the room, yet had not seemed to affect them in the least, a cry of anguish from the millionaire, a sudden spasm, and death.

Three of the remaining millionaires had capitulated.

They had followed the routine indicated in the letter for showing their willingness to pay. And they were paying, transmitting the money to the dreaded Zin Zandor by means which they refused to divulge. For Zin Zandor had made it apparent that any information given to the police would result in death.

Tolliver Hemingway alone of the remaining men who had been threatened refused to be cowed. He hurled forth his defiance, and the mail had brought him the information that he would meet his death on the twenty-fourth day of June.

Now midnight had struck on the twenty-third of June, and the clocks clacked off the seconds of the fatal twenty-fourth.

"WELL, we might as well have a drink," said Inspector Hunter, pouring himself a stiff jolt from some of the prewar whisky the millionaire's cellars had furnished.

"None for me," said Hemingway. "I think I'll go easy on the drink. One can't tell . . ."

The inspector snorted.

"Don't be foolish. You're absolutely safe here. Every bit of food and drink in this room has been checked by two police chemists. I wouldn't even waste the time to sit here with you, only the public are in a panic over this Zandor fellow, and we've got to show them how powerless he is in the face of adequate precautions. In the meantime our paper and handwriting experts are at work on those letters. They were all written on a Remington typewriter, and all on the same machine. The stationery has been traced to a job lot that went to one of the big stationery firms. It's a cinch."

He drained the whisky.

Carl Ramsay scribbled a sentence in a notebook, and, as he wrote, read aloud the words he jotted down for future reference.

"The Man Who Dares Not Eat," he intoned. "We'll run a picture over that."

Nick Searle snorted.

"You've got a cinch with that yellow journal of yours, Ramsay. Wish I had things as easy."

Arthur Swift stirred in his chair uneasily.

"You both have a snap compared to me. What am I supposed to do?"

Searle laughed.

"Look wise and feel foolish. Along about nine o'clock we'll cook up a column or two for you to write about the scientific angle of the thing. I'll dope out what I want, you can stick in a couple of high-sounding scientific terms, something about metabolism and the oxidation of tissue. We'll run your picture at the head of the column. There'll be a catchy headline, 'Noted

Professor Explains Hysteria,' or something of the sort. The idea will be that there was something akin to hypnotic suggestion in the minds of the men who died."

Carl Ramsay lit a cigarette.

"Better headline than that," he said:

"'Scientist Pits Skill Against Death.'"

Searle stretched, yawned.

"You'd ought to have the city editor I've got to go up against," he said gloomily.

And Arthur Swift, watching Ramsay, suddenly saw a peculiar thing. The right hand of the reporter seemed to vanish. He rubbed his eyes. The hand was back in place.

But, for a split fraction of a second, the right hand of the tabloid reporter had simply vanished. It had not only dissolved into space, but the right arm, almost to the shoulder, had ceased to exist.

It could hardly have been a mere freak of the imagination. Neither could it have been an optical illusion. For Arthur Swift had been able to see everything else within that room clearly and with normal vision.

Tolliver Hemingway, the millionaire, was taking a cigarette from a gold case. Searle was biting the end from a cigar. Ramsay was smoking. His left hand was conveying the cigarette from his lips. Inspector Hunter was finishing the last of the generous drink he had poured.

Everything was entirely normal, save and except for that sudden disappearance of Carl Ramsay's right hand. It had happened that Arthur Swift was watching that right hand. He had seen it suddenly become nothing. He had blinked his eyes, and the hand was back, reaching for a notebook. It could not have been more than a tenth of a second that the hand

was gone, perhaps not half that long. Yet it most certainly had disappeared.

"LOOK here," said Swift, "did you fellows notice anything just then?"

They looked at him, and as their eyes saw the expression on his face, they snapped to rigid attention.

"What?" asked Searle.

"Shoot," said Inspector Hunter.

"Your hand," said Swift, addressing himself to Ramsay, "it seemed sort of—er—well, sort of funny."

And then a strange thing happened.

Ramsay opened his lips to make some reply, and the sounds that came forth were not words. They seemed a peculiar rattle of gurgling noise that beat with consonant harshness upon the eardrums, rattled against the intelligence with such terrific rapidity that they were like static on a radio receiver.

"What?" asked Swift.

Ramsay drawled slightly, in his normal irritating tone of voice, as he reached for the pencil and scrawled a line across the notebook.

"Guard Goes Goofy," he scribbled, and said: "That'd look fine under your picture. It shows what hysteria will do. Sort of fits in with a general theory. Get a man to believe that a sickening sweet odor will produce death upon him alone, and then fill the room with such an odor, and the man who believed it would be fatal would kick off. Good thought that. I'll write it up with a by-line by Professor Somebody-or-other: Scientist Suggests Solution."

Inspector Hunter snorted. "Foolish to have amateurs in a place like this."

Searle frowned. "One of the first things you've got to learn, Swift, in a situation of this kind, is to see things

and see them accurately. Don't go letting your imagination run away with you. Now all the *Star* wants is the use of your name and some scientific terminology. Maybe you'd better curl up and take a nap."

But Tolliver Hemingway, accustomed to appraise character with unerring accuracy, leaned forward.

"Tell us what you saw?" he said.

Arthur Swift turned red. Under the rebuke of the reporter who had employed him, he realized how absolutely foolish it would sound for him to mention that the right hand and arm of a man had disappeared—had become simply as nothing.

"Why—I guess—."

The steady, keen eyes of the multi-millionaire bored into the young man's face.

"Yes. Go on. Nothing's too absurd to be given careful attention."

"Well," blurted Swift, "if you've got to know; it sounds sort of goofy, but—"

He broke off as a cry of alarm burst from the lips of Carl Ramsay.

"The odor!" he cried.

And there could be no doubt of it. The room was filling with a peculiar odor, a something that was like orange blossoms, yet was not like orange blossoms. It was too sickeningly sweet to be pleasant, yet so cloyingly rich that it was not unpleasant.

Tolliver Hemingway was on his feet, his gray eyes snapping.

"All right, boys; don't think I'm afraid, and don't think any hysteria is going to get me. Inspector, I've one request. If anything *should* happen, search every man in this room, from his skin out. I have an idea this—"

He paused. A look of surprise came over his features. He clutched at his throat.

"I . . . am . . . not . . . afraid," he said, thickly, speaking slowly as though paralysis gripped the muscles of his throat.

"It . . . is . . ."

And he swayed on his feet, lurched forward, flung out a groping hand. The hand clutched the rich cloth which adorned the table on which Inspector Hunter had set his empty glass, and on which the whisky bottle reposed. The cloth came off. The glass crashed to the floor. The bottle rolled across the room.

Tolliver Hemingway crashed to the floor.

He was dead by the time they managed to open his collar and take his limp wrist in their fingers.

INSPECTOR HUNTER rushed to the window.

Outside, the searchlights played silently across the darkness of the grounds, their beams interlacing, bringing trees and shrubs into white brilliance, casting shadows which were, in turn, dispersed by the rays of other cross-lights, flickering and flitting. The whole side of the building was covered by floodlights, and the inspector had no sooner thrust his head from the window than a voice from below called up.

"All right, inspector?"

"Anybody come near here?"

"No, sir. Of course not, sir. Our orders were to shoot on sight."

"Who's there with you?"

"Laughlin, O'Rourke, Maloney, and Green."

"One of you sound the alarm. The others wait there. Shoot any stranger on sight."

Inspector Hunter whipped a service revolver from his belted holster, and fired two shots from the open window, signal to the various guards. Almost

immediately a siren screamed forth the agreed signal of death.

Inspector Hunter turned back to the room, then, suddenly snapped his revolver to the level.

"Get your hands up, Searle!"

The surprised reporter, in the act of shooting the bolt on the door, regarded the inspector with a puzzled frown.

"I've got to get to the paper. I can handle this so much better on the ground than I can over the wire. We'll get out an extra—"

There was no mistaking the cold calm of Hunter's voice.

"Get away from that door or I'll shoot you like a dog. You know what this means. It's the beginning of a reign of terror. This is once that the news comes second. You men will remain here. The murder will be kept absolutely secret until we've exhausted every possible clew.

"And every man in this room is going to be searched from the skin out. Everything in this room, including the very air, is going to be analyzed. Damn it, I'm going to get at the bottom of this!"

And Nick Searle, white-faced in his rage, slowly turned back from the door.

"The *Star* will break you for this," he said, in a low tone, vibrant with anger. "You can't pull a stunt like this and get away with it."

"The hell I can't," said Inspector Hunter, his cold eyes glittering over the barrel of his service revolver. "Get back in the corner, and take your clothes off. Every damned one of you take your clothes off."

He turned to the window.

"Green, send up some doctors, and two of the chemists. Let no one else come in to the grounds or the house. Let no one leave. Keep your mouth

shut. Have two men come up here and knock on the door. Let them have their revolvers in their hands. Let them shoot to kill at the first sign of disobedience to my orders."

And then Inspector Hunter slammed down the window.

The sickening sweet odor was still in the air, but it was not as noticeable as before.

"Boys, take off your clothes and stand over there in the corner, naked as the day you were born."

Ramsay sneered. "Inefficient Inspector Insults Interviewer."

Searle added another thrust: "Police Inspector Drinking at Time of Tragedy."

HUNTER whirled on him.

"You'd use that? After my pulling the wires to get you in here so you'd have an exclusive?"

"I'd use anything," said Searle, his face still white. "The news comes first. You can't hush this thing up, and you can't stall it. The *Star* will get scooped by every paper on the street."

Inspector Hunter shook his head, slowly.

"It won't get out."

"Aw, hell. It's getting out right now. There were reporters watching the house, watching the grounds. Think they heard those shots and the alarm siren without putting two and two together? They'll have extras on the streets within an hour announcing the death, and they'll make a pretty shrewd guess at what's happened afterward."

Hunter lowered the gun slightly.

"The department will issue flat denials. We'll deny the death. We can't let this get out. It would rock the city. It would start a reign of terror. This means the police are powerless."

"You can't hush it up. Your denials

will only get you in bad at the start, and give the other papers that much more prestige when you finally have to admit the truth."

Hunter shook his head.

"This is an emergency the like of which has never faced the city before."

He jerked up his revolver as one in whom the last vestige of indecision has vanished.

"Get over there and get your clothes off."

"Hunter Has Hysterics!" rasped Ramsay. "Intoxicated Inspector Incarnate Inefficiency!"

"Get your clothes off!" yelled Hunter.

There was a double knock at the door.

His eyes squinting over the barrel of his revolver, Hunter threw open the door. Two uniformed policemen with drawn guns stood gaping on the threshold.

"Boys, see that these men strip!"

Nick Searle moved slowly, reluctantly.

"You'll strip, too, damn you," he said, "or I'll write an article accusing you of the murder."

"Examiner Evades Equal Examination" sneered Ramsay, moving, however, toward the corner indicated by Hunter.

"No. I'll join you. That's fair. That's what I wanted these boys up here for," said Hunter, throwing down his gun, and taking off his collar and tie as he moved to the corner.

The police chemists found four naked men and a corpse in the room. They made a minute examination of every article in the room. They analyzed every single thing that they fancied might have played a part in the tragedy. They examined even the tobacco in the cigarettes, the paper

with which they were tipped. They found nothing.

DAWN found the men working frantically.

It also found extras on the streets, intimating that there had been a tragedy despite the vigilance of the police. It found a crowd surging about the streets which bordered the spacious grounds of the millionaire's mansion.

Noon found Hunter throwing up his hands in helpless despair.

Three o'clock found him pleading with the reporters to be reasonable and give him a break. But Searle and Ramsay, insisting upon the right of the press to print the news, were obdurate.

They were released from custody at three fifteen.

Searle took Swift to the *Star* offices. There they wrote frantically. Swift was given a rewrite man. He gave a few scientific terms covering possible causes of death, made some comment upon atmospheric poisons, and then read the proof on an article that was more wildly speculative than any thoughts he had dared to formulate or utter.

"Celebrated Physicist Hints at Atmospheric Poisoning," he read, then, lower down, in smaller type: "Mysterious Ray Penetrates Walls and Locked Doors. Possibility that Radio May Act as Transmitting Medium. Scientist Confirms Report that Intoxicated Inspector Delayed Transmission of News to Eager Public."

The cashier handed Swift a check that was three times the amount of a month's pay at the State college.

"We'll want a follow-up to-morrow. You'll get the same rates," he said.

"In the meantime?"

"Do anything you want. Keep in touch with the office."

Swift bowed, reached for his hat.

At that moment the telephone shrilled sharply. One of the men barked excitedly as he listened to the sounds that rasped through the receiver.

Another reporter came in, breathless.

"Here's a photo of the letter," he said, and rushed to the dark room.

"Better stick around, Swift," said Searle. "Hell's to pay."

CHAPTER II.

TRAILING AN EVIL GENIUS.

EVENTS of the next two hours were crowded.

Six new letters had been mailed. Five had been to wealthy men. The sixth had been to none other than the President of the United States of America. Five of the letters contained a demand for money. The sixth letter demanded that the nation accept Zin Zandor as dictator.

The penalty in each case for refusal was death.

The millionaires were to begin paying tribute immediately. The government was given thirty days within which to comply with the demand. At the end of thirty days the President was to die, first of a series of martyrdoms only to be ended by surrender.

But sheer luck had given the law a break.

Post office employees had been instructed to note anything unusual in the mail, particularly anything unusual in the mail addressed to wealthy or prominent people.

One Steve Roscin, a mail carrier, driving to a mail box to pick up the

mail, had noticed rather a striking figure striding away from the box.

It was a man well over six feet tall, thin, slightly stooped. The figure was muffled in an overcoat, despite the fact that the day had been oppressively warm. There was a long black beard which concealed the lower part of the face, dark glasses over the eyes, and a crush hat, pulled well down.

But the postman had caught a good look at the right hand. It was a peculiar ring on the third finger that had caught his eye. He described the ring as being carved in some grotesque fashion in the shape of interlaced triangles of white against a background of red.

The postman insisted that the ring was fully as large as a twenty-five cent piece, perhaps larger where it bulged out into a circle of mingled gem and design.

At the time he had paid no great attention to the man, noting only the overcoat, the beard, and the unusual ring. But when he had opened the green box, his eye had alighted upon six letters at the top of the pile of mail.

The uppermost letter had been addressed to the President of the United States of America. The other five letters were addressed to people of prominence in financial circles.

The postman had acted quickly. He had slammed the mail box shut, jumped into his car and whirled about in pursuit of the strange figure.

At the corner he was in time to see the man climb into a red roadster of speedy design, whose make the postman had been unable to determine. In the gathering dusk, the roadster had shot away from the curb and easily outdistanced the lighter car which the postman was driving.

He had abandoned the futile pursuit,

and had telephoned to headquarters at once. Experts had appeared, examined the letters for finger-prints, opened them, found their terms, and had immediately started a search for the tall man in the red roadster who wore a peculiar ring and who wrote his letters on a Remington typewriter.

The police predicted an arrest within twenty-four hours, stating they would make a house-to-house canvass of the city if necessary.

ARTHUR SWIFT, caught in the excitement of the investigation, remained at the *Star* offices until nearly midnight.

By that time the telephones were ringing constantly, giving new clues, cases of arrest of suspects. Garages were combed for red roadsters, people were asked to report any tall figure with beard and overcoat that had been seen at or about the time.

The police adopted the theory that the beard was a disguise, that the overcoat was merely to prevent recognition, and that the man probably did not live anywhere near the place where the mail box was located, but had written the letters, then driven to some isolated section to mail them.

By midnight there were no fewer than fifty tall suspects incarcerated at police headquarters, awaiting a complete check of their activities for the day.

Arthur Swift caught Nick Searle for a short conference.

"Look here, Searle, there's one thing about this business that's strange."

"Meaning?"

"The time those letters were mailed."

"What of it?"

"They must have been already writ-

ten, held ready for mailing, but the mailing was to be at a certain definite time."

"The time?" asked Searle, smiling, rather patronizingly.

"The time was when the person who did the writing was certain the death of Tolliver Hemingway had taken place."

Searle continued to smile, the smile of calm superiority.

"Wrong, Swift. The time was when the writer knew that the people had been advised of the death of Hemingway."

Swift shook his head.

"No. You see it would have taken the letters twenty-four hours to be delivered at the very least. Therefore, had the writer been absolutely certain of Hemingway's death, he would have mailed the letters, knowing the press would have the facts long before those letters were read by his victims."

The smile melted from Searle's features.

"By George, there's a thought there! Then you mean the person who committed those murders wasn't absolutely certain the murders had been committed. He only released certain agencies of destruction, knowing that they *should* work, but those agencies were not sufficiently certain to make him positive of their success."

Swift, knowing that he now held Searle's attention, nodded.

"That," he said, "is one possible explanation. The other is harder to comprehend, but yet, in some respects, more logical."

"Shoot," said Searle.

"That the person who ordered the mailing of those letters was one of the persons who were in the room with Hemingway, and was, therefore, unable to communicate with his accom-

plices until after Inspector Hunter had released him."

SEARLE dropped into a chair, although his knees had suddenly weakened.

"Not that, Swift. That would make four of us suspects—and you, being of scientific training, would be the first they'd go after. They'd slam us in cells and start giving us third degrees that would make us wish we'd never been born. Why, we've been panning the inspector, calling him intoxicated and all that. Lord, how he'd delight in having some legitimate excuse to get us thrown in the jug and work us over."

Swift nodded.

"I hadn't thought of it from exactly that angle, but I was wondering about Ramsay."

"What about him?"

"You remember I mentioned seeing something just before Hemingway's death?"

"That's right, you did."

"Well, I'm going to tell you what that something was. It sounds incredible, but for a split fraction of a second, Ramsay's hand vanished. The hand and the biggest part of the arm just melted into space."

Searle knitted his brows.

"Listen, son, you haven't batted around the way I have, and you don't realize what tricks nervous strains will play on a man. They sometimes kick about the reporters being so hard-boiled and calloused, but a man ain't worth a damn as a reporter until he does get calloused. You were all worked up, and your eyes just started playing tricks on you. Even if they didn't, how could anybody have managed to bring about the death of Hemingway without leaving any clew at all?"

Swift was stubborn.

"Somebody did. And it must have been done by unusual methods. Therefore, anything unusual—"

Searle surrendered the point. "All right. Let's drop around and see Ramsay. We'll ask him what he knows about it. That'll convince you. Ramsay's on the square."

They got hats and coats, went out into the velvety midnight. They found Ramsay's room, knocked on the door, got no answer, walked in.

Searle turned on the light.

Swift stood by the door.

The click of the switch showed a scene of confusion. Drawers were pulled from the dresser. The mattress had been slit in a dozen places, and the stuffing pulled out, strewn over the floor. The bedclothes were wadded into a knot. A suitcase had been cut open. The clothes closet showed a pile of garments, the pockets pulled wrong side out.

A letter file had been dumped in a chair, and the wind from the open window had sifted various letters about the room. All over the floor, even on the walls were drops of blood, and those blood-drops were scarcely dry.

Searle made a wry face.

"Another victim," he said.

Arthur Swift made a hurried examination of the various letters and papers while Searle was telephoning the police. Among some of the more recent letters he found a bit of paper which contained a single word: "Tonight."

That bit of paper was undated and unsigned, but, in the lower right hand corner was the imprint of a seal, an affair of interlaced triangles, the impression of which was visible only when the paper was held at an angle to the light.

Swift laid the letter or note back in the pile of papers.

"Know anything about rings?" he asked Searle.

THAT individual impatiently shook his head.

"To thunder with all that hooley. The thing that we've got to find out is the method of death. Then we can guard against it. And we've got to trace each individual victim. Imagine what it means when some individual can inflict death at will upon any certain man he may select, regardless of the precautions with which that individual is surrounded! Then he writes a letter demanding certain things of the government, threatening to take the life of the President.

"And he can do it, too. Make no mistake about that, Swift. I've seen 'em come, and I've seen 'em go. I know the work of the fanatic and of the bluffer. But this man is different. He works too efficiently, too damned efficiently. Imagine picking a time right after midnight to bump off Hemingway! He picked the very time when everybody was the most alert. He did it to show how little he cared for us or our precautions."

"Maybe," responded Swift. "But you've got to admit that ordinary measures get us nowhere in this case. Now there were rings made along in the fifteenth century that were known as poison rings. They were large, made especially to hold a quantity of poison, and I have a hunch such a ring figures in this case. I'm going to find out."

"How did the murderer get the ring in contact with Hemingway?" asked Searle.

"Perhaps he poisoned him with a slow moving poison that was implanted in his system days before."

Searle grinned. "Wrong again. He gave Hemingway the option of avoiding death at any time by simply paying out money."

Swift made for the door.

"Anyway, I'm going to beat it before the police arrive. After the way you've been panning Inspector Hunter it'll be only a question of hours until he figures out a scheme for getting you on the inside. I don't want to be around."

And he walked out, went to a nearby hotel, registered under an assumed name, took off his clothes and sank into deep slumber.

By morning he was ready to run down his theory. He called on certain antique ring dealers and made known his wants, a poison ring of large capacity, answering a general description.

There were five prominent dealers in such jewelry. Three of them gave him blanks. But the fourth scratched his head, consulted his books.

"It is possible we might get you such a ring. We sold one a little over sixty days ago to a man who makes a hobby of rings. He buys, holds for a while, then sells or trades."

Swift whipped out a pencil.

"Give me his address. I'll pay you a commission if I make a deal."

"Marvin is the name," said the dealer. "I'll give you the address in a letter of introduction."

Marvin was at home, genial, cordial. He was a little man with puckery eyes and perpetually smiling lips. He was hardly the type one would have picked as a murderer.

Swift broached the subject of rings, gradually leading the way around to various poison rings.

"I had a magnificent specimen a couple of months ago," said the collector. "But my physician took a fancy to it and I gave it to him."

Art Swift nodded, as though the information were of but casual interest, talked for half an hour, purchased a small antique ring, and finally announced an obscure physical ailment which had been bothering him for some time.

Marvin suggested a good physician.

"Don't know any," remarked Swift.

"Try mine. Dr. Cassius Zean."

Swift yawned.

"Thanks, I may look him up. Well, I've got to be going. It's been a pleasure to chat with you. Good morning."

Dr. Zean! The name filled him with curiosity. The man whose name was Zean might well have adopted a name such as Zin Zandor.

HE called a cab, went at once to the doctor's office.

An office girl was busy at a typewriter. Swift moved over so that he could see the make of the machine. It was an Underwood. A white-uniformed surgical nurse bustled in and out of the outer office. She had Swift fill out a card with his name, address and occupation.

The doctor, it seemed, was in, but would see no one that day. It would be necessary to make an appointment. Art Swift made an appointment for the latter part of the week, but insisted upon an immediate interview. The nurse withdrew to take the message to the inner office. She was gone for some time. Swift felt the uncomfortable feeling which he experienced at times when he felt people were talking about him.

While he was sitting there, twisting his fingers, his brain racing with thoughts and conjectures, he heard the telephone on the desk at his elbow give a series of clicks.

The desk, he saw, was one where the surgical nurse held forth when not busy elsewhere. He wondered if the telephone was merely an extension of the telephone in the private office and if the clicking of the bell clapper denoted a conversation starting by the removal of the other receiver.

Casually, he half turned in his chair. The girl at the desk was clacking out letters on the typewriter. Her eyes seemed to be entirely occupied. Stretching forth an arm, moving with the air of one who is bored and restless, Swift inserted his hand under the receiver, cupped the palm and gently lifted the receiver so that the spring tension on the hook caused a contact.

Instantly he heard the metallic raspings from the receiver which showed a conversation was being carried on over the line. Swift was sitting in a chair which brought his ear not very far from the level of the desk. He managed to work a book under the receiver, holding it up a half inch or more from the hook. Then he slumped down until his ear was but an inch or two from the edge of the desk.

The conversation became faintly audible.

"Send a messenger after it right away. We need some..."

"Can't let you have it for half an hour."

"All right. They're raising hell, making a house-to-house search of the city. Better be careful about mentioning that ring. Somebody may ask you about it."

"No chance of that. Send a messenger directly to room 920, knock once, then pause and knock twice. Will I know this messenger?"

"No, this will be a new one."

"All right. G'by."

"G'by."

There was a series of clicks from the wire. Swift slipped the book out from under the receiver. The girl at the other desk continued tapping the keys of the typewriter.

The surgical nurse appeared, frowning, to communicate the doctor's refusal to see any one except by appointment. Swift acknowledged defeat and left the office.

His mind fairly reeled with the information he had received. The telephone conversation doubtless referred to the search that was being made for the tall man with the odd ring. It was very possible that Dr. Cassius Zean was none other than the mysterious and sinister Zin Zandor.

Swift debated whether to call up Searle, finally decided to do so. He went to a public telephone, called the newspaper office, and found that Searle was out. He left a message for him.

"Tell him I've got something hot. I'll call again in half an hour. If he comes in, have him wait."

CHAPTER III.

UNCHAINED LIGHTNING.

AS he hung up the telephone, a daring thought possessed Swift.

Why not stroll up to room 920, knock once, pause, and then knock twice? The voice over the telephone had said the doctor wouldn't know the messenger!

The thought had no sooner entered Swift's mind than it crystallized into action. He sprinted for the elevator, was whisked to the ninth floor and walked the corridor upon nervously impatient feet.

At 920 he paused, contemplated the plain door for several seconds, was painfully conscious of the throbbing of

his pulse, and knocked. He paused, knocked twice.

There was a vague shadow flitting over the ground glass square. Then the shadow took bulk and sharpness of outline. Swift had visions of a tall, sinister figure with a cold eye, and was absolutely unprepared for the short, stumpy man with fleshy jowls who glared at him.

"Well?"

"Messenger. Told to get somethin' here," said Swift, slurring his words together to disguise his nervousness.

The doctor glowered at him from eyes that were as twin chunks of polished ebony.

"Come in," he said. "You're early."

"Am I?" asked Swift, striving to appear casually unconcerned. "I was told to come in half an hour. I walked around for a while, didn't have my watch."

The doctor grunted.

Swift noticed that he was slow and lagging in his movements, that his lips were a sickly blue, that the flesh sagged down in flabby pouches. There were pouches beneath the eyes, pouches below the cheek bones, a pouch below the chin, and a sagging pouch at the belt. The doctor was wheezing from the effort of walking toward the door.

He went to the door on his right, which Swift surmised must lead to the reception room, and locked it. Then he turned toward a door enameled a pure white.

"Just making a final test," he said.

Art Swift got a glimpse of a long, well-lighted room. There were white tables, chairs, a long sink, a battery of test tubes, bottles, retorts, microscopes, and a cage full of canaries. These canaries sang in nervous, chirping voices, fluttering restlessly from perch to perch.

3 A

Dr. Zean left the door open as he entered the room.

"Sit down," he wheezed over his right shoulder. "You must be the man that's detailed to cover Washington."

Swift resolved on a bold stroke.

"I am," he said. "The chief sent me down here to get my stuff and get started."

"Know how to use it?"

"Only generally. I understood you were to give me instructions."

The doctor turned, frowned. His ebony black eyes bored into Swift's features. The blued, flabby lips quivered.

"All damn foolishness trying to— Oh, well, you aren't to blame."

He reached in the cage. The birds fluttered their protests at the invading hand, flung themselves against the gilded bars. At length the fat fingers closed about a slim, yellow body. The bird gave a shrill cry of alarm, then was pulled from the cage, wings fluttering and flapping, occasional feathers drifting to the floor.

DR. ZEAN raised a hypodermic, jabbed the needle into the fluttering bird. Almost instantly there came a rapid change. The fluttering wings began to move more rapidly. They gave forth a low humming sound.

"Watch," said the doctor and liberated the bird.

The wings were moving so fast now that it was impossible to see them. They were like the wings of a humming bird, giving forth a low, droning sound. The canary hung for a split fraction of a second, poised in the air, then zipped into flight. Such a flight it was!

The bird seemed like a yellow streak, moving with incredible speed. Swift

turned his head to follow the flight, turned it back again. Try as he would, he could not keep the bird in sight. Neither could he lose sight of it. The canary was merely a flash of yellow.

So rapidly did it move that the eye could see it only as a swift flicker of motion. Like an electric spark, it was impossible even to tell the direction of its flight. One time the bird seemed to be going in one direction, yet almost immediately it appeared in the opposite side of the room.

No direction in which Swift could direct his eyes but what that droning yellow streak zipped across his field of vision with such rapidity that it seemed there must be half a dozen of the birds in the air at once. In fact, there were several occasions when there seemed to be three different birds flying in opposite directions at the same time.

Swift rubbed his startled eyes.

The husky voice of the doctor took up a brief explanation, a word of warning.

"Time," he said, "is an illusion of the senses. Space is an illusion. If there's anything in infinity as an established fact, then there can be no limit to either time or space. To think of something that has no limit, yet has an existence, is absurd. Our finite minds place a limit on everything. So does existence.

"Therefore, the limitation of space and of time are the limitations and fallacies of the mind. It's like a single tube radio set. It has a limited range. That doesn't mean the radio waves that it receives are limited to that field. Same way with the human mind.

"Now some organisms live much more rapidly than others. Their concept of time is so radically different that the life energy is used up in a few hours.

"Naturally, if one could determine the particular gland which controls that time element it would be possible either to speed up life or slow it down. The dog uses up his allotted life energy in seven or ten years, the horse in a longer time. And there are cell organisms that live but a few hours.

"There's no time for details. You wouldn't understand them, anyway. But the point I'm making is that the extract I am able to furnish doesn't do anything to give new energy. It simply directs the speed with which the existing energy is burned up. So you've got to be careful of the dosage. It's barely possible that one could take a sufficient dose to live up a whole lifetime in five minutes.

"The effect of this extract is to speed up everything. It wears off as quickly as it takes effect. The muscles, the nerves, the brain, the heart, all function according to the new scheme of things. And your strength is multiplied accordingly.

"We don't know what strength is. Take the elbow, for instance. It's a fulcrum for the forearm. The raised forearm is a lever of the third class. The power is applied but a few inches from the fulcrum. Yet a strong man can raise a fifty to eighty-pound weight in his hand without difficulty.

"Take a pencil and paper, calculate the moments of force and you'll see that this calls for an utterly incredible amount of power to be applied to the forearm. In fact the bone wouldn't stand such a strain. Take the forearm of a cadaver, put such a weight in it and raise it by mechanical means and the bone snaps.

"Therefore strength has something mental about it. The mind acts on the molecular structure in some way. Gravitation is the tendency of the

molecules of all matter to draw together in proportion to the mass. Because of the greater mass of the earth it attracts an object many millions of times more than the object attracts the earth."

THE doctor ceased speaking and glared at Art with a look of hostility.

"Damn it, your mouth has flopped open as though the whole thing was strange to you. I've repeatedly warned those who sent you to see that this preliminary ground was covered first. I can't be running a kindergarten here!

"Now here's a box. That box contains two dozen little capsules and one big capsule. The little capsules contain enough of the extract to speed up your physical and mental processes at the rate of one hundred to one. Each capsule terminates in a hollow needle. When you are about to make use of a capsule take a deep breath, insert the needle, squeeze the capsule.

"Within the space of three deep breaths you will find your processes speeded up. You will move, think, breath, talk one hundred times faster than normal. The small capsules last for about thirty seconds. Then the effects wear off. During that half minute you have lived fifty minutes of your normal life at a rate one hundred times as rapid as ordinary. Remember that your fast motions will be utterly invisible to ordinary eyes. If you talk, your speech will be unintelligible.

"It will be advisable to take two or three preliminary doses so you can accustom yourself to your new rate of life, and be able to gauge your motions accordingly.

"Now the big capsule is to be used only in the event of a major emergency. Every man is similarly

equipped. It will speed up your life at the ratio of five hundred to one."

There was an imperative pounding at the door which led to the reception room. Dr. Cassius Zean stifled an impatient exclamation, and wheezed his way to the door.

"I'm busy," he said.

The girl's voice that drifted through the panels, contained some note of alarm. Art Swift could not hear the words. The doctor shot the bolt. The surgical nurse appeared in the crack of the open doorway. Art Swift kept his back turned.

There was the hissing of a sibilant whisper.

"Very well. I'll attend to it at once," said the doctor.

The nurse turned, paused, swung back. Art Swift could feel her eyes upon him.

"Turn around!" she cried.

Art turned, and, as he turned, he took a swift step toward the pair.

The girl's eyes burned into his own. Her lips parted in a screamed warning. "He's a spy!"

Dr. Cassius Zean flung a hand toward his hip.

The girl jumped into the room and kicked the door shut. Her face was chalky white, the lips a thin line of grim determination.

"A knife!" she cried. "No noise!"

But Dr. Zean was lugging a heavy revolver from his hip pocket.

Art Swift was unarmed. The girl was coming toward him, fury blazing from her eyes. The doctor was raising the revolver.

Art made a wild leap.

The girl went through the air and tackled him with outstretched arms, a tackle that would have done credit to a football star. Despite himself, the surprise of the attack, the weight of

her hurtling form, threw Swift from his feet. He staggered, tried to catch his balance and crashed to the floor.

"Crack him!" he heard the girl say.

He saw Dr. Zean's arm upraised, bringing down the weapon in a crushing blow, and flung up his knees, swung to one side.

The blow missed.

"Then shoot him, quick!" yelled the girl. "He's breaking my grip!"

Even as she screamed the words, her hands slipped from the struggling body, and Art Swift lunged out with a circling arm, caught the ankle of the pudgy doctor, and gave a jerk. The foot slipped, the ankle gave, and the huge bulk came down with a thud. The girl's hands had been busy. She was scratching at his face, biting, kicking.

ART rolled over, got to one knee, heedless of the fury of the nurse. He swung his right arm. The fist connected with the purpled jaw, but, even as he struck the blow, Swift realized that something was wrong. The flesh he hit was the color of fresh putty. The lips were blued, parted, gasping. The tongue protruded. Dr. Zean's heart had given out, the excitement proving too much.

There remained the girl.

Swift flung his arms about her, held her helpless. He grabbed a roll of bandage that had become tangled in his feet and whipped it about her hands. She tried to scream then, but he stifled the sound, thrust the roll into the parted teeth. There followed a subdued gurgle. He tied the gag in place, endured the white hot fury of her eyes, finished binding the wrists and ankles.

There was a closet opening from the room. He pushed her in there, gave a final inspection to the knots, closed and locked the door.

Then he turned to the doctor. He was dead, this pudgy physician who had isolated the extract that governed the tempo of conscious life.

As Swift started to search his pockets, there sounded a knock at the door of 920. A pause. two knocks. It was the messenger!

Art Swift grabbed the coat collar of the inert clay and dragged the pudgy form along the floor to the door of the laboratory. He pushed the man inside, closed the door and walked toward 920. His fist was clenched. He was ready to strike the instant the man walked across the threshold.

He slipped the bolt, threw open the door.

"Come in," he said, and then gasped his astonishment.

The figure that entered the room was that of a young woman, well-formed, beautiful. She smiled at him graciously.

"You are Dr. Zean? I was to receive certain things. Doubtless there is no explanation necessary," and her lips parted in a smile.

Art Swift floundered in a confused greeting, invited her to be seated.

Should he tie and gag her? But she was so smiling, so innocent in appearance, so refined in her manner. Violence was unthinkable!

Then, as he hesitated, another thought flashed across his mind. Why not give her that which she sought, send her away and follow. She would lead him to the rest of the gang.

He bowed deeply.

"If you'll excuse me a moment," he said, and went toward the door of the laboratory. He was careful to open it in such a manner that she could not see the corpse, and promptly closed it behind him.

He searched various shelves, finally

found that which he sought, a little pile of metal boxes in which were capsules similar to the ones the doctor had shown him.

He took a box of the extract, returned to the girl and gave her as much of the doctor's talk as he could remember.

"You look as though it was all news to you!" he stormed, just as the doctor had stormed at him. "I can't run a kindergarten here. Why can't they explain these rudimentary preliminaries to you before you come? Take this box and go."

"Hadn't I better try a capsule?"

He grunted, still keeping in the part of a testy scientist, impatient at having to explain fundamentals to an ignorant woman.

"I don't care what you do!"

SHE flashed him a smile, opened the box, took out a capsule, took a deep breath, jabbed the needle into her arm, squeezed the capsule.

Then Art Swift realized that he, too, must test this diabolical extract of some nameless gland, or the girl would be able to vanish, moving a hundred times more rapidly than he could.

He grabbed a capsule from the box she held in her hand.

"I'll take one with you," he said, and took a deep breath.

The girl was breathing deeply. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were brilliant with excitement and with the stimulus of this strange substance.

Swift felt the bite of the needle, felt his blood tingle with the sting of the extract, and glanced at the clock on the wall. It was precisely two fifteen. The second hand of the mechanism was tick-tocking around its smaller circle. The minute hand pointed at the figure three, the hour hand at two.

The girl's potion took effect first.

He suddenly saw her start to get up. Then it was as though she became a blur of motion. She walked, and her feet moved so rapidly the eye could scarcely follow. She talked, and her lips showed only as a filmy substance. The sound of her words was as the clatter of a watchman's rattle.

She made toward the door, moving so fast that she was as a streak of whizzing speed, and then something clicked in Swift's brain. Just as he was trying with leaden feet to move and intercept her, he suddenly saw her moving at normal speed, her hand on the door-knob.

"Well, I guess I'll be going," she said.

Swift wondered if the effect of the extract had worn off so quickly.

"Just a moment," he said, sparing for time.

"Yes?" she asked.

"You felt the effect of the extract?" he wanted to know, curious as to her feelings.

"Just a slight dizziness. When does it take effect? It seemed to make you almost unconscious. You must have sat motionless for nearly five minutes. I talked to you and you didn't answer. You seemed sick. I was alarmed."

A sudden explanation flashed upon Art Swift. He looked at the clock. It was three seconds past two fifteen. The second hand seemed to have stopped in its motion. But there was a low-pitched sound coming from the clock, a long-drawn rasping of some sort of slow-moving mechanism.

He listened, attentively.

"T...O...C...K," said the clock, and the second hand moved an infinitesimal fraction of an inch of crawling motion.

He pointed toward the clock.

"Can't you see? You're under the influence of the extract now."

She regarded him with startled eyes, then moved toward the clock.

As she walked, Art watched her clothing. It was flattened against her figure as though pressed by some invisible hand. Then he remembered a strange, whizzing sound that had been in his ears as he had moved.

The girl modestly pulled at her skirt. It remained plastered against her limbs.

Swift laughed.

"The atmospheric pressure remains the same," he said. "You are moving just one hundred times more rapidly than normal. Naturally, your speed through the atmosphere forces your clothing against you. There's no use struggling with it. You'd have to remain still for some apparently perceptible interval to give the air currents a chance to adjust themselves."

The girl laughed, a nervous, throaty laugh.

SWIFT found himself keenly interested in the various physical phenomena which surrounded them.

"Do you mean to say we've speeded up our lives so we live fifty minutes while that second hand clacks through thirty seconds?"

He nodded.

"And when I'm in the room," said the girl, "and take the drug, then what do I do?"

Of a sudden, Art Swift knew exactly what she was to do.

"Simple," he said. "Train yourself to sit absolutely still. Remain motionless with your body for minutes on end. Move only your right arm. That will enable you to put the poisoned cigarette in the hand of the victim without being detected. The motion of

the hand will be far too swift for ordinary senses to detect. If any one should happen to be looking directly at you he will see your right hand apparently disappear. So be careful not to make the motion until every one is looking in some other direction."

"But what if they should flash me a quick glance?"

"Quick?" He laughed. "The quickest glance they could flash you would be so slow that you would see their eyeballs move as though by slow clockwork."

"And the cigarette?"

"Will have the extreme end of it filled with the poison. The victim inhales it fully into his lungs and dies. The other occupants of the room sense only the greatly diluted odor of the poison gas as a sickening sweet smell."

"Goodness!" she exclaimed. Then, her eyes filling with some sort of emotion he could not fathom: "I must be going."

She moved toward the outer door.

"I'll see you to the elevator," said Swift, and opened the door, taking care to slip a metallic box of the capsules into his hip pocket.

The outer office looked just as it had when Swift had first seen it. The furniture, the windows, the rugs. But as he opened the door he seemed pulling against a great weight, and he noticed the sudden vacuum swirl the rugs into bulging ripples of slow motion.

He understood then what he had done. He had jerked that door open with a motion one hundred times as swift as the ordinary opening of a door. It had disturbed the atmospheric equilibrium of the room.

Alarmed, he glanced at the stenographer to see if she had noticed it, to see if she would sense anything unusual in a strange man's emerging from the

private office, escorting a young woman to the door.

As he looked, she was about to glance up from her typewriter. She was striking the letters of the machine, glancing toward the door. Swift pressed the arm of the girl.

"Notice the mechanics of alarm," he said.

They watched.

Slowly, the girl's eyes swung upward. The lips sagged open in what was doubtless to be a gasp, but it was so ludicrously slow that they both laughed. The right hand pressed down on one of the keys of the typewriter. They saw the type bar slowly move upward to strike the paper.

The bar struck the paper, remained pressed against it for what seemed seconds, then slowly began to drop back. The carriage started a sluggish movement to make way for the next letter which was already being pressed, and still the girl's eyes had not fully raised to the two figures who were watching her.

"Let's move and see if she can follow us," said Swift.

He grabbed the girl's arm, darted to one side.

The typist's eyes were raised now, but they stared in wide-eyed, frozen alarm at the place where they had been and not at the place where they were.

CHAPTER IV.

OUTLAWED FROM MANKIND.

THEY darted to the outer door, tugged it open, slipped into the outer corridor.

"I didn't get your name," said Swift.

"Louise Folsom."

"You're the Washington agent?"

"Er—yes, the Washington agent."

She jabbed a forefinger to the button of the elevator.

They waited for a short time in silence; then, suddenly, Swift burst out laughing.

"Foolish. You can't get an elevator."

"Why can't I?"

He pointed to the glass door through which could be seen the cables controlling the cages. The strands were crawling at such a slow rate it seemed the cable was hardly moving.

"We're speeded up too fast. You'll have to wait for what'll seem a very long time, or else take the stairs."

"Nine flights?"

"Nine flights."

"How long will it seem to me if I go down on the elevator?"

"Nearly ten minutes."

She paused, uncertain.

"I rather think I'll wait. Nine flights is a long way."

This gave Swift the opportunity he was looking for.

"All right. But be careful when you get in the cage. Move so slowly that you seem to be fairly crawling. Try to take eight or ten seconds to get into the elevator. Don't try talking with anybody until the effect of the extract wears off. You've got your box?"

She nodded.

Swift turned and left her, walking down the corridor.

He noticed a red light flash on over the elevator door, saw the bottom of one of the cages come creeping into view and slowly crawl to position before the door. This was the break for which he had been waiting, and, as the girl concentrated her attention on the elevator, Swift darted for the stairs.

He went down the nine flights with

such speed that his coat streamed straight out behind him. He beat the elevator to the ground floor and was waiting when the door opened and the girl came out.

She had forgotten his admonition, and was rushing at a rate of speed a full hundred times faster than that of the average pedestrian in a hurry. Open-mouthed spectators stood frozen to motionless surprise as she whizzed by them. Then, as she gained the street, they seemed not to see her at all, so rapidly did she move.

Swift followed her, and emerged from the office building into a strange world.

Automobiles barely crept along the street. Even the noise and confusion of the city had been toned down until it sounded as a hollow boom of slow noise, low-pitched, almost inaudible. Hurrying pedestrians seemed standing upon one leg, their feet almost motionless. Their swinging arms were held at grotesque postures. A newsboy crying his wares stood for seeming minutes with his mouth open, a queer, rattling sound slowly emerging from the throat. A paper being waved in front of a passing pedestrian seemed utterly motionless; one corner, fluttering in the wind which whipped down the street, was barely moving.

Swift followed the girl, keeping well behind her, swinging his way between other pedestrians as though they had been inanimate figures, bunching on the sidewalks for purposes of ornamentation.

NO use to take a car or cab. Walking at a rate of speed that seemed painfully slow, the atmosphere whipped his garments until it seemed they would be torn to ribbons. The girl's short skirt streamed

and fluttered, flapped and blew, whipped and skirled. Her hair came out from under her hat and streamed back of her head. She was exerting her every ounce of strength to fight against the wind caused by her rapid progress through the air.

Swift figured they were walking at a rate of speed that would ordinarily have taken them two miles an hour. Now, multiplied a hundredfold, that speed of two hundred miles an hour caused the terrific rush of air to threaten to tear their clothes off their backs.

He felt his coat whip and slat into a ripping tear. He slowed his speed still further, noticed that the girl's skirt was coming off, saw her stop to adjust it. Yet it seemed several long minutes before it ceased its fluttering.

During all of this time the street traffic seemed barely crawling along; the wheels of the automobiles hardly moved in their slow revolutions.

The girl resumed her pace. She was walking more slowly now. A man standing at the window of a store, apparently engrossed in the display within, seemed vaguely familiar to Swift. As he glanced for a second look, he saw the girl was approaching him. She put her hand on his arm.

The man started what was evidently intended to be a swift whirl. To Art Swift it seemed to be but a slow motion picture of a slow motion picture. After an interval of what seemed seconds he had his eyes telling more than his ears, for the two were gazing at each other, and the man was Nick Searle of the *Star*.

The girl was talking. Swift could see her chin move, see the lips opening and closing. Searle was trying to talk, but the slow, drawling sounds which issued from his leisurely lips were

nothing the girl could wait for. Her eagerness to impart her information made her pour out a torrent of sound at top speed.

Swift wondered how much longer the drug would act, and, even as he wondered, saw the phenomenon happen before his eyes. The girl suddenly became a sluggish replica of her former self. She had started a gesture with her right hand. That gesture slowed in its motion until the hand barely crawled toward the lapel of Searle's coat.

Swift knew then that the drug had worn off. He remembered also that he had taken his drug just a second after the girl had taken hers. That would give him the advantage.

He moved forward, walking as swiftly as he dared, the wind whipping at his garments.

So rapidly did he move that the eyes of the two never faltered from each other. Not by so much as a glance did they see this man who was circling them at a rate of speed which made him almost invisible.

There was a pillar of concrete supporting an alcove, almost directly behind Searle, and Art Swift made for this place of concealment. He wanted to hear what the girl was saying, and he wanted to warn Searle that the girl was in reality one of the gang of crooks that bid fair to terrorize the country.

He leaned forward. The girl was speaking. Her slow words drawled with such exasperating languor that it seemed to take fully half a minute to drag out a word.

The traffic continued to crawl. Noises were as a low-pitched clack of sound, overlapping at times, but hardly audible. And then, right in the middle of a sentence, Swift's ears snapped

back to normal. There was a brief period of dizziness as his functions returned to normalcy.

OF a sudden the traffic resumed its customary rumbling roar and shot past the store. The girl's voice was shrill with hysteria. The words ceased to drawl, but beat upon Swift's ears as the patter of a torrential rain on a tin roof.

"I have some of the drug. He never questioned my identity at all."

Searle's voice was also rapid, fierce in its intensity.

"Could you recognize this man?"

"Of course."

Searle pulled a photograph from his pocket.

Art Swift, crouched behind the pillar, cast about for some way by which he could warn Searle of the identity of the girl, of the danger of being trapped. But the reporter handed her the photograph.

"Why, yes. It's this man, the third from the end."

"Great Scott! Why, that's Art Swift!"

"I can't help who it is. It's the man that gave his name as Dr. Zean."

Swift's mind whirled. What was this all about? He started to step forward.

"Then we'll have to kill him on sight," snapped Searle's voice. "He knows too damned much!"

Swift sank back against the support of the cold concrete.

Searle, then, was the real arch-villain in the whole affair! He had been the one to bring about the deaths of the millionaires. He had been the one to send the letters to the unfortunate men who had attracted his attention.

As Swift turned this matter over in

his mind, Searle and the girl moved away.

Swift waited a few minutes, thinking, then moved out into the stream of pedestrians. A chance fragment of a passing man's conversation came to his ears.

"Something whizzed right in between us. It must have been a cannon ball or something. It went so fast I could feel the air tugging at my clothes, but I couldn't see a damned thing. I'd have thought I was dreaming or drunk, but Roberts felt the same sort of a sensation."

Swift moved away. His senses were reeling. He looked at his watch. It was exactly sixteen minutes past two o'clock. All of this frantic action had taken place in just about a minute.

He thought of the dead doctor, the nurse imprisoned in the closet. He must arrange for the arrest of the nurse, and he must arrange to have Searle arrested.

A sudden drowsiness overtook him. He went to his room in the hotel, telephoned police headquarters, and asked that a detective be sent out to interview him. Then he fell asleep.

The newsboys were crying "Extra!" on the street when he awoke, and some one was pounding on his door. Swift turned the key, instinctively knew the square-toed man who hulked on the threshold was a detective.

"You had a tip an' wanted a man from headquarters?" asked the man.

"Yes," said Swift. "Come in."

The detective entered the room, whirled, swung out a hand. By sheer luck Swift was able to dodge that grasping hand.

"What—" Art began, dodging another fist, and then the detective was on him in a lunging attack.

The very bulk of the man made him

clumsy. Yet his charge knocked Swift to a corner. He saw it all, then. This could be no detective, but an agent of the crime ring, sent out to kill him. Fear and desperation gave him strength.

The other was pulling a revolver from his hip. Swift swung a chair. There was the crashing of wood as the rungs slivered, and then Swift saw the man staggering back, slumping to the floor.

SWIFT ran from the room to the foot of the stairs. A newsboy thrust out an extra of the *Star*. Swift grabbed it, and, to his horror, saw his own features staring forth at him, just underneath the words:

KILL THIS MAN ON SIGHT!

Then followed an article about the identification of Art Swift as the arch killer, the greatest blackmailer, the scientific wonder who had used his genius to undermine civilization.

Swift stared at it, stupefied. Was it possible Searle was so daring as to hope he could prevent discovery by making a counter-accusation? The idea had merits, particularly as the *Star* argued that the scientific knowledge of the criminal made him immune to arrest and necessitated his being shot as a mad dog would be dealt with.

Swift read the article. To his surprise, it exposed the secret of the extract which speeded up the human metabolism to such an extent that life was lived a hundred times more rapidly than was possible under normal conditions.

The article claimed that Searle had solved the mystery with the aid of a female assistant who had tricked the

arch-criminal into explaining the details of the crime to her.

That might have been correct. The girl might have been an assistant. Then Searle would not be the real criminal, but just what he appeared, a reporter. Yet, suppose this was merely a trick? Suppose Searle was so clever he had planned for this all along?

Swift wanted to think it over. He clutched the newspaper to him, started for a taxicab. There was the crash of glass, a bellow of rage, the shrill of a police whistle.

The detective had smashed out the glass of the hotel window, was frantically blowing his police whistle. As men looked up in startled surprise, the detective opened fire.

Swift ducked behind a parked car. The bullets from the detective's gun crashed into the metal, splattered the glass from the door windows, but failed to find their real mark.

Swift realized, however, he was trapped. It would be all right if he had a chance to tell his story. But how about the hysteria of the police? Would they get rabid and shoot on sight as the *Star* requested them?

He thought then of the box he had in his pocket, the rubber capsules that would speed up his body so that he could escape. He slipped the cover from the box.

And just then a burly form catapulted around the corner of the car. Swift had only time to thrust the box back in his pocket. The cover clattered to the sidewalk. A great blue-coated figure swung a club. Swift tried to dodge, but to no avail. He felt the impact, felt a great wave of nausea and engulfing blackness. Dimly, he realized that the thing that smacked him between the shoulders was the cold pavement. He felt the bite of handcuffs at

his wrists, and then lost all consciousness.

CHAPTER V.

IN A FROZEN WORLD.

SEARLE'S voice was in his ears when he regained consciousness.

There was a tang of jail odor in the air. His form was stretched on a prison pallet and the steel ceiling contained a single bright incandescent, which stabbed his throbbing eyes.

"From the looks of this telephone number, we figured it might be a lead. I got Louise Folsom to give a ring and stall along for information, and the conversation sounded promising, so I sent her up.

"She ran onto this Swift. Of course, she didn't know him at the time. He was merely a certain Dr. Zean. But he proceeded to explain to her just how the murders had been committed and—"

He broke off as there was a commotion near the door.

"We knocked over that office and found a nurse tied and gagged in the closet, and a dead man in the laboratory. Looks like there's hell to pay. Somebody had been in the place and cleaned it out, busted up bottles, pulled out drawers, and raised hell generally." A red-faced sergeant was speaking.

There was the scraping of chairs.

Swift struggled to a sitting posture. "Can't you understand, you fools?" he asked.

Hands grabbed his coat, jerked him forward.

"All right. Let's hear your story."

Swift kicked with his feet. "Take these handcuffs off."

A clock, clacking off the seconds, pointed to three minutes to four o'clock.

"Leave him with a guard and let's go see the office and the dead man," said one of the officers.

"Triple handcuff him, then," said Searle, "because he's the man who pulled the murders. There's no doubt of that in my mind."

"It was Ramsay," said Swift, striving to be patient. "I blundered on to this Dr. Zean, and—"

"Save it!" snapped one of the officers.

"No, no, let him talk."

Art Swift told his story. The officers looked at one another, incredulity stamped on their faces.

"There's a chance," said Searle, speaking judiciously, "just a chance that he's right. But, Swift, how did you know about the idea of switching cigarettes, the mechanics of the murders? You told Louise just how to go about it."

"Pure deduction, putting two and two together," said Swift.

One of the men clicked a key in the lock of the handcuffs.

"Stand up here and we'll make a search," he said.

Swift moved to stand up, and, as he did so, felt as though a hundred needles were shooting into his hip. He jumped, gave an exclamation, then as it suddenly dawned on him what had happened, he frantically plucked at his hip pocket.

"The capsules!" he exclaimed. "They've spilled from the metal box, and I jabbed myself with them!"

He pulled out of his pocket the crushed capsules. He had given himself a terrific dose of the extract. Nearly all of the capsules were crushed. The extract had penetrated to his blood. Even the big, five-hundred-to-one capsule had discharged its contents.

Men moved toward him.

"Maybe it's a s...u..."

Searle was talking, but midway in the sentence, his mouth ceased to make sounds. The extract had taken effect, and Swift was speeded up to a terrific rate of activity. The men before him were arrested in mid-motion. One of the officers had been in the act of jumping forward. His feet, Swift noticed, were both off the ground.

ART amused himself by walking around the officer, bending down and inserting his hand beneath the officer's foot. He couldn't feel the foot even moving.

He waited patiently for what seemed seconds, waiting for the situation to change. It remained unchanged. Men remained as they had been, their eyes staring, their mouths open. Every possible expression of surprise was depicted upon the frozen faces.

Swift realized that there was no use spending hours in that jail waiting for these men to dawdle through their slow motions.

He walked to the door.

Even when he walked as slowly as possible, the wind tore savagely at his garments. He knew then that he was speeded up many times faster than when he had taken his first, experimental capsule. He was living at a ratio of at least five hundred to one, perhaps much faster.

He worked his way through the jail doors.

At the outer door a guard was stationed and the officer who sat on a stool on the other side of the door was peering intently through the bars. The door was locked.

Swift reached through the bars, grabbed the guard by the coat collar, pulled him forward. He pulled so slowly that it seemed hours before he

had the man against the bars. Yet he noticed even that slow motion was about to jerk the head of the officer from his neck.

He had to reach out with his other hand and pull the head of the guard so that it followed the body. Otherwise he would have broken the neck of the unfortunate man.

He searched the pockets, found the key, fitted it to the lock from the outside, manipulated it with the tips of his fingers, and heard the bolts shoot back.

He pushed open the door.

The guard was as he had left him, but, as Swift watched, he fancied he detected the faintest possible motion of an eyelid, the beginning of a slow flutter.

Swift waited for what was, as nearly as he could judge, five minutes, watching that eyelid. There could be no question of it, it was slowly moving.

"Evidently he started to wink when I grabbed him," said Swift to himself, interested in the scientific aspect of the phenomenon. "It only takes a man around a fiftieth of a second to wink his eye, but I can't even see the blamed thing move. I must be speeded up so fast I whiz like a bullet!"

That thought made him wonder how a bullet would appear. Could he see it leave the gun?

He took the revolver from the officer's belt, pointed it at the steel wall of the jail and pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened.

He waited, watching, his wrist braced for the explosion.

"Something wrong," he said, and lowered the weapon, put it back in the holster of the officer. As he did so, something unusual about it caught his eye. The hammer of the weapon was only halfway back.

"Must have forgotten to cock it, but

thought I did," he mumbled, and took it once more from the holster.

Then an explanation dawned upon him. The hammer was descending, ready to fire the shell. But that split fraction of a second which elapsed between the pulling of the trigger and the exploding of the shell was so multiplied by his speeded-up senses that it seemed an interval of minutes.

He looked around the jail for a while, watching the postures of the men who remained as living statues, motionless. Here was a man who had been about to sit down. Now he was suspended in mid-air, his body jack-knifed, the weight on his heels.

Swift watched him for a while, then returned and took up the revolver. The hammer was just about to contact the shell. Swift moved to a place where the light was good, pointed the weapon, waited.

THERE was a faint jar, a slow impulse up his wrist. Then he saw something mushroom from the mouth of the weapon. It was the bullet, propelled by a little mushroom of fire and smoke.

He was able to follow the progress of the bullet from the time it left the gun until it struck the wall of the cell. He could even see it flatten against the steel and start dropping to the floor.

He knew it must be dropping because he could see that nothing supported it. But it remained in one position so long he was unable to detect motion.

He returned the weapon to its holster, walked back to the cell where the officers had been interrogating him. The men all remained in the same position. The officer who had been jumping forward still had his feet off the floor.

Swift turned and walked from the jail, out into the late afternoon sunlight.

The atmospheric conditions bothered him more than any other thing. There was a perpetual shortness of breath. It seemed as though his laboring lungs simply couldn't suck enough air into his system. It was only when he was walking that he could breathe comfortably.

It must be that the rapidity of his progress forced the air into his lungs. But when he walked the wind pressure against his body was terrific. It tore his coat to tatters, and it was a physical impossibility to keep his hat on his head. He had the unique sensation of walking at a rate of speed that seemed to him to be somewhere around one mile an hour, and having the air pressure whip his hair straight out while his garments were torn.

And he was isolated in the midst of a busy world.

The street was crowded. People were starting for home. Street cars were jammed. Vehicular traffic was at its peak. The sidewalks were a seething mass of jostling humanity frozen into rigid inactivity.

Everywhere were people. Yet nowhere was motion. There was no sound. The universe was as silent as the midst of a desert. Occasionally there would be a faint buzzing sensation in Swift's ears, and he realized that this was probably caused by sound waves which were too slow for him to interpret as sound.

He walked across the street, threading his way through traffic, and wondering how long this strange sensation was to continue. He thought of the words of the dead scientist that it might be possible for one to live his entire life in a space of five minutes.

What a terrible fate it would be to be left to go through an entire lifetime without any contact with other people, to go from youth to middle age, middle age to doddering old age, all the time in a city that was suspended in the rush hour of its traffic.

If the scientist had been right, it would be a horrible fate. There was a man getting in a taxicab. It might be that Swift would be an old man before that fellow had traversed the length of the block. He could amuse himself for a year, then come back and find the taxicab just starting, perhaps the cabbie would be in the act of closing the door.

When Swift got to be an old man he could come hobbling back to the corner and find that the traffic signal had changed and that the man in the cab was halfway across the street.

It was an appalling thought.

But Swift was glad he had not been imprisoned in a cell. He might even have been held in a dark dungeon. He paused to think of what it would have meant. He would have had no food or water. He would have starved to death in what would, to the ordinary mortal, have been but half a dozen seconds, perhaps not that long.

The air tugged and whipped at his garments. He crawled painfully along, thinking over the events which had led up to the strange position in which he found himself.

CHAPTER VI.

AMONG LIVING STATUES.

ART thought of Carl Ramsay and of how Ramsay would undoubtedly have summarized the situation in headlines. "Time Ticks Tediously," or some such alliterative ex-

pression. And, thinking of Ramsay, he suddenly thought of the murders, and knew that he must apprehend the real criminal.

He had unlimited time at his disposal. He could cover all trains, all means of escape. It only remained to walk where he wanted to go. Any form of so-called rapid transportation was out of the question.

One mistake he made. He jumped over the wheel of a machine that stood between him and the curb. The trip up in the air was quite all right. In fact he felt like a feather. Had it not been for the atmospheric resistance it would have been simple. But the rush of air held him down somewhat.

Even so, he jumped faster, farther and higher than he had intended or thought possible. This was doubtless due to the fact that his strength had multiplied with his ability to speed up the muscular action.

But when he wanted to come back to the sidewalk he found that he could not do so. He was held a prisoner, floating in mid-air. The force of gravitation was so slow that it seemed he wasn't even drifting toward the sidewalk.

Finally he managed to claw his way along the side of a building, find a projection, use this to give him a handhold, and push himself toward the sidewalk.

He walked for fully a quarter of a mile before a strange pressure seemed to strike the bottoms of his feet. Then he knew that he was normally just alighting from the jump he had made. The force of gravitation had just taken hold.

That very element made it difficult for him to get about. He found that he dared not trust to any jumps, but must keep at least one foot on the pave-

ment; if he made any sudden motion, there was not enough friction engendered by the force of gravitation to give him a foothold.

Altogether, it was a strange world, one in which every physical law seemed to be suspended. This was due, not to any change in the world itself, but merely to a change in the illusion of time. To express it in another manner, it was due entirely to the fact that Art Swift could think more rapidly.

The rate of thought, then, controlled environment.

It was a novel idea to toy with, but he couldn't wait for speculation. He had work to do. He must solve those murders, apprehend the real criminal.

He started with Carl Ramsay.

Undoubtedly Ramsay had been the point of contact for the murders. He had taken some of the drug, diluted so the tempo of living became a hundred to one. He had switched the cigarette Tolliver Hemingway was about to take from his cigarette case, for a poisoned cigarette in which the first half inch of tobacco had been prepared with some poisonous drug.

The millionaire had inhaled that drug with the first puff of the cigarette. Then, when he exhaled the smoke, the other watchers in the room had been able to get the odor. But Hemingway had received the full force of the concentrated gas.

It had been simple.

But Ramsay had grown careless. He had made his substitution when Swift's eyes were upon him. Swift hadn't been able to detect what was going on, but he had been able to see the sudden disappearance of the fast-moving right hand and arm, and then, when he had talked to Ramsay, Ramsay had tried to answer before the drug wore off.

That was the reason those first sounds which came from Ramsay's lips had been so unintelligible. Doubtless they had been words, perfectly formulated. But the sounds had been so rapid that it had been impossible for the eardrums of his hearers to split those sounds into words.

Then something had happened to Ramsay. Either he had planned his disappearance because he knew he would be suspected, or else he had actually been abducted after a struggle.

Swift determined to find out which.

HE battled his way against the ever-present roar of the rushing atmosphere to Ramsay's room and took up the trail from there.

The police had combed the room, and had taken every article that might be of value. Yet Swift made a search of his own, going into every nook and corner. He found nothing.

He wondered if he should make an attempt to cover trains, and thought of Dr. Zean's office. He might find something there, and he could drop into the Union Depot on the way.

He walked down the stairs to the street, and suddenly jerked himself upright with an exclamation. A strange sight met his eyes.

The street was frozen into arrested activity. He had grown accustomed to that spectacle. A horse was trotting, and but one foot was on the ground. On his back was a mounted policeman. He had evidently been swinging his club. Now he was like a mounted statue. A taxicab was cutting over on the turn, and the tires on the outside were flattened by the weight of the car. There was not the slightest motion in either wheels or tires.

But that which arrested Swift's attention was the peculiar sight of a man

walking casually through the tangled mass of arrested traffic.

The man's coattails were whipped out behind. His hair was streaming. His hat had gone, and he walked with the peculiar pavement-shuffling gait which Art Swift had found so necessary to cultivate.

Here, then, was a man, the tempo of whose life was some five hundred times plus that of other men. Here was a man who must be inoculated with the mysterious extract which Dr. Cassius Zean had discovered. By that same token, he must be one of the outlaw gang.

He carried a suitcase, and the suitcase had been streamlined to make it offer less resistance to the air. He walked like a man with a certain fixed purpose, and he seemed perfectly at ease, confident in his own power.

Watching him, Swift became convinced the man was an old hand at this rapid-life. He seemed to show no interest in the strange phenomena of the frozen world where motion had been stilled. He walked calmly, sedately.

And Swift, slipping behind a parked automobile, watched him curiously, wondering what strange errand had caused this man to speed up his life at a ratio of five hundred to one.

The other slithered his way across the street, paused before the door of an imposing edifice. There was a fleshy woman leaving the door of that building, and Swift had noticed her prior to seeing the other man.

She was tugging at the door, one foot stretched out, ready to step to the pavement. Her mottled face was flushed with dark color. Her glassy eyes were staring straight ahead. Her mouth was open. Probably she was gasping for breath, but it would have taken seeming hours for her progress

to the place she was going, minutes for the first intake of her breath to be apparent.

Swift realized now that he had no mere five hundred to one ratio in his life tempo. The cumulative effect of the dosage he had taken when several capsules jabbed their contents into his blood stream had given him a much faster rate of life than that. He had no means of knowing just how fast.

THE man he followed walked directly to the door out of which the woman was emerging. He ducked under her arm, brushed against her, and entered the lobby of the building.

Swift followed.

Once the man turned. By the simple process of freezing into complete immobility, Swift defied detection. All about were the figures of men staring with glassy, unseeing eyes at what was going on about them.

There was a policeman standing at a marble table in the center of the flagged floor. All about were counters, wickets, gilt cages.

Swift realized he was in one of the big banking establishments. The man he followed walked to one of the cages. He took a key from the inert hand of a guard, unlocked the cage door, pulled it open, entered.

There were piles of gold on the counter, stacked up in glittering spheres of coin. The man scooped them into the suitcase. Then he left and went to another cage. Here he repeated the process. Here, also, there were several piles of large denominational currency. The man scooped these in with the gold.

When he had selected the cream of the plunder, he closed the suitcase and turned toward the door. Swift became

stock-still, standing with one foot out and up, as though in the act of taking a step. The man passed within three feet of him. When he had gained the street, Swift followed.

His quarry led him to a corner a block away. Here he sat the suitcase down, right beside a traffic policeman who was in the act of blowing his whistle.

He had left thousands of dollars in stolen gold and currency unguarded, right within reach of a policeman's hand. Yet he was perfectly safe in doing so. No one could move fast enough to pick it up.

The bank bandit shuffled into a jewelry store, selected several diamonds, dumped them into his pocket, returned to his suitcase, bowed his head to the policeman in ironical thanks, picked up the bag and crossed the street.

Swift followed.

The man walked as rapidly as the air resistance would allow. He seemed intent upon reaching a certain destination as quickly as possible.

He turned into an alley. A truck was standing there, motor running. The suitcase was tossed into the truck. There were more suitcases there, all of the same general design.

As Swift watched, another figure came around the corner, walking in the same pavement-shuffling manner, carrying a suitcase. He tossed this upon the truck, paused to speak with the man Swift had been following.

Then the two turned and came directly toward Art Swift.

Once more he froze into immobility. They passed close to him. One of the men stopped.

"Say, I've seen this guy before. Who the hell is he?"

Swift remained motionless, one foot reaching out as though taking a step.

Yet he knew there was something different in the studied balance of his pose from that of the other men who were caught in arrested motion.

"Never lamped him," said the second man. "Come on. We've got work to do."

But the man Swift had been following wasn't so certain.

"I'm telling you there's something funny about this guy. He stands funny, he looks funny. I've seen him before. I think he was standing in the bank I frisked. Let's go through his pockets and see who in hell he is."

"Aw, forget it. We got no time to be pulling all the funny stuff. That newspaper gave the whole show away, Doc Zean is croaked, and we ain't goin' to be able to get no more of the stuff. We gotta work fast and make a clean-up while the getting is good."

They moved away. Swift heard the man he had followed fling a final comment.

"When we come back we'll see which way he's walking and what he's got up his sleeve. He looks off color to me."

The men reached the mouth of the alley and turned away.

SWIFT started for cover, and, as he approached the place opposite which the truck was parked, saw a swirl of motion at the opposite end of the alley.

He adopted his usual expedient of standing absolutely still.

Two men, loaded down with suitcases, came into the alley. One of them stopped.

"Say, that guy wasn't there last trip!"

"What do we care? He couldn't do anything."

"Yeah, but he might be stallin'."

They set down their suitcases, walked with quiet menace directly toward Art Swift.

Then Swift caught sight of something else. Another man glided swiftly into the alley. There was something familiar in the posture of that man. He gave a swift glance and found that it was Nick Searle of the *Star*.

In some manner the reporter had speeded himself up so as to get into the game. Art thought of the metal box the girl had received, a box containing a complete assortment of the rubber capsules. Probably Searle had secured possession of that and had injected sufficient of the serum to take part in the strange game which was being enacted.

The two bandits approached Swift. Searle was not far behind.

"Hey, you, what you doing here?" asked one of the men, pausing before Swift.

Swift endeavored to keep his face entirely devoid of expression. He fixed his eyes upon distance, and held his breath.

"Aw, he's all right," grumbled one of the men. "Just some poor mutt that strayed into the alley and we didn't notice him the other trip."

"The hell we didn't," insisted the more suspicious of the two. "He just wasn't here, and if he wasn't—"

He moved his hand in a swift gesture, directly toward Swift's eye.

"If he's on the up-and-up, we can stroke the eyeball," said the man.

Involuntarily Art blinked.

"Ha!" exclaimed the bandit, and jumped forward, his fist swinging in a terrific uppercut.

Art sidestepped, jerked his head back to dodge the blow, and shot out a straight left.

He found the atmospheric resistance

slowed his punches somewhat, but the superior strength which had come to his muscles with the speeding-up process largely overcame that. It was his clothes that suffered most.

As he launched that straight left, the resistance of the air held his coat sleeve stationary. He had the peculiar sensation of feeling his sleeve peeled back from his arm, and the bare arm flashed forward in a quick punch which connected.

But the second man was busy. He swung a slungshot, and only missed Swift's head by a matter of inches.

"The damned spy!" yelled the man who staggered back under the impetus of Swift's punch.

Art knew he was no match for the two men, and jumped to one side, hoping to get where he could have his back to the wall. But they understood his maneuver and closed on him from different angles.

He ducked, caught a punch on the back of the head, felt his stomach grow cold as a fist landed in the solar plexus, and dropped to his knees. He flung out his arm, reaching for the legs that sought to kick him in the face, caught an ankle, jerked it, and had the satisfaction of seeing the man go down.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN WHO MASTERED TIME.

WITH a roar Nick Searle joined the conflict.

That was the determining factor. The men had hardly expected an equal battle. Having Swift down and getting ready to knife him was one thing; having that wiry young man on hands and knees grabbing at their ankles while another man swung lusty fists was quite another.

It took but four punches to decide the battle. The two bandits sprawled on the cement.

Swift was still on hands and knees, writhing in pain. But he had managed to tackle both of his adversaries with groping hands which had kept them from doubling up on Searle.

"Hurt?" asked Searle.

Swift made a wry face, gasping for breath.

"Wind—knocked—out."

Searle helped him to his feet.

After a few seconds Swift got over the temporary paralysis of the diaphragm which had been induced by the blow he had received, and gave a wry grin.

"How'd you get here?" Art asked the reporter.

"Took some of the serum and started out. Found I wasn't hopped up enough, so I put half a dozen of the small capsules into effect all at once."

"How did you know you weren't hopped up enough?"

"Because of the way things were whizzing by me. I tried to follow a man, and I might as well have tried to follow an express train. I figure we are living right now at a ratio of around three thousand to one." Searle seemed awed as he said the words.

"Not that fast."

"Mighty near it."

"The girl?" Art demanded.

"You mean Louise Folsom?"

"Yes."

"That's what worries me. They've managed to get her somehow, and they've carried her off. This looks to me like the final blow-up. The exposé in the *Star* has broken a lot of their power . . . You'll forgive us for jumping at the conclusion you were the mysterious scientist who was at the head of the thing? Tell me how you

got into it—but first let's get these two chaps tied up nice and tight and see if we can't locate where they were going."

Swift nodded.

"There's some rope on the truck. I'll tell you the story while we truss 'em up. And I think I know about where headquarters are."

"What truck? This one?"

"That's the one. You'd better be careful with those suitcases. They're all loaded with money and gems."

"What?"

"Fact. They've lost their power to terrorize the nation and make the big executives bow to their will, but they still have their power to rob without the victim's being able to guard against it. They're stripping the city."

"Humph. And there's only two of us," commented Nick Searle, as he trussed up one of the bandits. "Guns any good?"

"None whatever. The bullets could be dodged, and it takes forever and a day for the hammer to explode the shell. If we wanted to shoot one of these men when he broke loose, we'd have to start shooting the gun now. Then we could go about our business for a while, come back and see if the man had got the knots untied, and, when he did, trust the explosion of the revolver would happen somewhere along about that time."

Searle laughed.

"You paint a gloomy picture."

"It's almost that bad. Notice the truck is backed up to a cellar. I have an idea that cellar is of some importance. Let's explore in it a little."

"Suits me. What 'll we do with the men?"

"Drag 'em in . . . Look out! Here come another couple! Lord, there are two more. Four of 'em. We've got to

hide here in the truck, and when we start hostilities we've got to work fast. There's a couple of stakes that 'll make good clubs."

SWIFT crouched behind a pile of the strangely streamlined suitcases. Four men appeared, laden with loot. They called a greeting, started for the truck.

"Look out!" yelled one. "Somebody's hiding here!"

"Let's go!" shouted Art Swift.

The young scientist and the reporter got into action.

One of the outlaws, doubtless forgetting the uselessness of the weapon, pulled an automatic from his pocket, leveled it, and pulled the trigger. Then he dashed it to the ground when the weapon failed to explode.

Two of the men had knives. One climbed on the side of the truck, the other tried the rear.

Thud, thump sounded the clubs, and the men drew off, one of them with a broken arm.

"Let's go!" yelled Swift, for the second time, and they charged.

It happened that the two men had chanced upon the most deadly weapon available. Knives were limited as to range. Guns were of no use. Clubs, swung with terrific speed and force, were bone-breaking instruments of destruction.

Apparently these outlaws had never encountered resistance in the time-plane upon which they had learned to function. They had never experimented with various weapons, and the futility of their guns, the limited efficiency of their knives, left them helpless before the onslaught of the two men armed with clubs.

Searle surveyed the sprawled figures, grinned at Swift.

"Looks like a good job. Do we tie these up?"

"Sure thing."

"How about headquarters?"

"Let's investigate."

"Attaboy! Better keep that club. We'll probably run into some more trouble."

They lowered themselves into a cellar, pushing themselves down the stairs because the force of gravitation was too slow to function, felt their way along a passage, and emerged into a lighted room.

A man sat in this room with telephone receivers clamped to either ear. He was tall, gaunt, dominating. His eyes held a restlessness that seemed unclean, unhealthy. The thin lips were compressed into a single razor-blade slash that cut from cheek to cheek. His jaw was bony, determined.

On the third finger of his right hand gleamed a ring of interlaced triangles. He glanced at the two men, looked at their clubs, half rose from the chair.

"Mr. Zin Zandor, I presume," said Swift.

The restless eyes snapped to his face.

"So?" rasped the man, and fumbled beneath his desk.

"Stop him," shouted Searle, and made a wild leap forward.

Swift lowered the point of his club and launched it through the air like a lance with every ounce of force of which he was capable.

At the same instant he became aware of a sickening sweet odor which permeated the room.

ZANDOR tried to duck. The hurtling club caught him on the forehead as he lowered his head, cutting an ugly gash, sending him staggering back.

His right hand flashed up. It held a sort of gas mask, which he tried to raise to his nostrils. But the impact of the blow had dazed him. His hands seemed to function uncertainly. He turned half purple in the features as congested blood mottled the skin.

"He's holding his breath," shouted the reporter, quick to grasp the situation.

Swift whirled. Together they fought toward the door, holding their breath, the sickly-sweet odor seeming to constrict the muscles of their throats.

Behind them they heard a peculiar scraping sound. They turned for one last look.

Zin Zandor was clawing at the top of the desk. The poison gas had got him now. His features were distorted, his mouth open. Even as they looked he went limp, and apparently remained suspended in mid-air.

"Dead and falling," said Swift as he dragged his companion into the passageway, out to the open air.

They sucked in great lungfuls, feeling strangely dizzy.

"The girl!" cried Searle.

Without an instant's hesitation, Swift turned and led the way back into the passageway.

"Take a deep breath and we'll try for her. Probably the gas rises. Keep your head near the floor."

They dived down and crawled along the floor. The sickening sweet odor was in their nostrils. At the corner of the desk, inclined at an angle of almost forty-five degrees, was the form of the man who had signed himself Zin Zandor. He was falling to the floor, and the force of gravitation was so slow, compared to the speeded-up life forces of the two men who watched him, that he seemed to drift downward with hardly perceptible motion.

There was a door to the left of the desk. Swift took a deep breath, reached upward, turned the knob. The door opened; they scrambled into the inner room.

Here was a Remington typewriter, doubtless the one upon which the blackmail letters had been written. Here, also, was stored great treasure, gold coins, currency, gems. And here they found the girl who had posed as messenger. She was bound hand and foot, gagged—Louise Folsom, captured, doomed to die.

Her eyes stared straight up at the ceiling of the room. She made no move when they entered.

"Living at a normal rate. Can't see us," said Searle.

He drew a knife and cut the ropes. Even then she did not move. They watched her anxiously. The closed door was shutting out many of the poison fumes. But there was a chance she had already inhaled too many of them.

Searle reached out and gently touched the eyeball with the tip of his finger. The lid gradually—very, very slowly—commenced to droop.

"She's alive," said Swift.

The girl's lips moved with such slowness that the motion was hardly perceptible.

"She knows we're here, trying to talk."

Searle nodded.

"We've got to get her out of here. That gas, you know."

"The door's closed. Remember, it disperses quickly. It takes a concentrated dose to produce death. He probably had it in the ring. He intended to liberate the gas from the poison ring and fill the room with it. Then he was going to put on some sort of a gas mask."

"Yeah. Your blow with the club got him groggy, and he sucked in a mouthful of the concentrated gas before he knew what he was doing."

"HOW about getting the girl out?" "Let's try to carry her. But pick her up gently or we'll jerk her to pieces, and we'll have to stop easy like or—wait a minute—I'm feeling queer!"

At that same moment Art Swift felt a peculiar sensation at the pit of his stomach.

"The gas!" he exclaimed.

"No," said Searle. "We're coming back to normal!"

There was a brief spell of vertigo, and then, of a sudden, things were normal.

The girl's eyes were blinking; her lips were forming words.

Beyond the door that led to the other room something crashed—the body of Zin Zandor, just falling to the floor.

The girl's rapid words rang in their ears.

"Hoped you would come. They were planning to make this the day of the big clean-up. They had all their men ready to bring on a reign of terror, and they were going to kill me."

Swift pointed to a door that opened from one side of the room. He picked up a chair, crashed it through one of the panels.

"Let's get out of here!"

They felt the tang of fresh air upon their faces, saw the street roaring with the busy life of a rush hour. The noise burst upon their ears. In the alley, motor running, was the truck, filled with the strangely shaped suitcases. Sprawled just inside the door, where the two adventurers had dragged them, were the bodies of the

unconscious bandits, tied hand and foot.

There was no traffic in the alley, but the street just beyond was filled with activity.

"Load 'em in and start for headquarters," said Searle, and grinned.

The girl climbed into the driver's seat.

"I can handle the truck."

They struggled with the men, got the inert figures into the truck.

"Let's make a good job," said Searle.

Swift caught his drift and grinned assent.

They returned to the cellar. The fumes of the deadly gas had dispersed. There remained only an odor, something like that given off by orange blossoms. The dead form of Zin Zandor sprawled on the floor.

They carried it to the truck. Then they loaded the stored treasure. Then they started the truck.

"Go to the *Star* office," Searle called to the girl. "We were the ones to blacken Swift's character, and we might as well be the ones to laud him to the skies as the hero who saved the country."

The girl flashed him a smile.

"Scientist Saves Day!" she said.

"That reminds me, where do you suppose Ramsay is?"

"Suicide," said Searle. "We found him just before I met you last. He had blown his brains out and left a typical note—poor chap: 'Reporter Reaps Ruin—Rum Ruins Ramsay!'"

They were silent for a moment.

"He was in on it from the beginning, of course?" asked Swift.

"Yes. He was the contact man. He actually switched the cigarettes. He faked an attack upon himself to divert suspicion."

Swift sighed. "Man, but I feel sleepy!"

"Effect of the drug. We've been living rapidly, perhaps more than a year in the last few hours. It's gone out of our lives."

"A year in a day," laughed the girl. Swift caught her eye.

"Then I've known you a year, Louise," he said.

Her answering smile contained no trace of offense.

"We can call it that, Art."

"A heck of a fast worker," said Searle. "That goldarned scientist doesn't need to have any one pep him up with a lot of extracts to make him work fast!"

All three joined in a laugh as the truck with its strange load swung to a stop before the *Star* office, the biggest scoop in a half century delivered at the very door of the newspaper.

THE END.





"Look tough, Angel Face"

Murder! Murder!

Thurbo's bulldog tenacity or Brampingham's ideals of justice—which will decide the fate of Soupy Joe, the pawn in a tense legal game of love and ambition?

By GEORGE F. WORTS

Author of "The Diamond Trail," "The Lost Punch," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

"SAPPHIRE ROSIE" VIARETTO was mysteriously murdered and robbed on the evening of June 4, 1930, in a speakeasy known as Dad's Coffee House, in Greenboro. "Soupy Joe" Gorlish, who had once been jilted by Rosie and who had a long criminal record, was arrested and charged with the murder.

Soupy maintained, however, that he was now going straight, that he had an honest job as a taxi driver, that he was in love with one Sophie Klemm

and was saving money to marry her, and that he had been asleep in bed at home at the time of the Viaretto murder—all of which his disreputable mother corroborated.

The accused wanted Gillian Hazeltine, a famous attorney known as "The Silver Fox," to defend him, but Hazeltine refused.

Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham, the handsome son of one of Hazeltine's university classmates, volunteered to take the case, being con-

This story began in the Argosy for July 12.

vinced of Gorlish's innocence and desiring to triumph over Jake Thurbo, the prosecutor.

Thurbo was District Attorney Yistle's assistant. Both Thurbo and "Buck" Brampingham — whom he called "Angel Face" — were in love with the same girl, Jane Parr. Jane regarded Jake as too bulldoggish and Buck as too idealistic. She felt the Gorlish trial would determine whom she should marry.

Hazeltine promised to hire Buck as his assistant if the golden-haired young man won the case. He invited Buck, Jake and Miss Parr to a dinner party at his home.

CHAPTER V.

TABLOID JOURNALISM.

"WHAT," Mrs. Gillian Hazeltine innocently wanted to know, "did you do in college, Mr. Thurbo?"

The assistant district attorney looked up from his tomato bisque with an eager smile. "I played halfback in football and did a little boxing on the boxing team."

"Don't be so modest, Jake," spoke up Buck Brampingham. "You were the best halfback State had in ten years. And you darned near won the intercollegiate heavyweight championship."

Vee looked from one flushed face to the other, and her husband glanced at her, then at Jane Parr. The eyes of all four glowed with suppressed excitement; the faces of all four were colorful with the same stirring emotion. Currents and cross-currents!

Vee now turned to the golden-haired young man. "What did you do in college, Mr. Brampingham?"

The lawyer who would defend Soupy Joe Gorlish in the forthcoming trial did not raise his sapphire-blue eyes from the tomato bisque.

"I didn't do much of anything except study."

"I should think," said Vee, "that you would have done wonderfully in athletics."

"My father," the golden youth explained in a low, husky murmur, "didn't want me to go in for athletics. So I didn't."

"Athletics aren't everything," Jake Thurbo stated boldly. "You were voted the best-looking fellow in the class, weren't you?"

Buck Brampingham said little, but there was hate in his glance. "That doesn't count for much."

"It certainly does!" cried Vee. "It counts for a great deal."

"Jake," Gillian put in, "was voted the man most likely to succeed."

"And he certainly deserved it," said Buck generously.

Gillian didn't like the way the wind was blowing. What he liked to see was two men standing toe to toe and slugging. This delicate sparring did not amuse him. When he was in a fight he punched hard, and he liked to see others punch hard. Needless to add, he was one of the greatest surviving admirers of Jack Dempsey.

"Well," he demanded recklessly, "who's going to win the Viaretto case?"

"The best man," said Buck.

"The one who deserves to," retorted Jake.

Toro came across the lawn with the grace and noiselessness of a ghost. Behind him were three men. One of them Gillian recognized as Mr. Adelbert Yistle, his old enemy, the district attorney; another was Jack Sniffen, the

Daily Mirror reporter, and the third was one of these chinless, nameless beings who take photographs for tabloid newspapers, with the eyes and smile of a rat, the nerve of a bull moose, and the inconsiderateness of a coyote.

The district attorney was the first to reach the table. A square-built man, with a strong judicial forehead surmounted by a mop of iron-gray hair, and a massive pair of jaws surmounted by an iron-gray mustache, Mr. Yistle was a commanding figure. His gray eyes were now flashing, and his face was beet-red. Evidently he was furious.

He restrained himself sufficiently to concede something to the amenities; bowed to Vee, and he tried to keep the emotion out of his voice when he addressed Gillian.

"Look here, Gill," he began in a croaking voice, "I thought I understood you to say this morning that you were not going to touch this Viaretto case."

GILLIAN smiled and nodded, but his eyes were narrow. He didn't like Bert Yistle any better than Bert Yistle liked him. Beyond Bert, he saw the reporter jotting down notes on a folded sheet of yellow paper. Off to the right of the reporter, the camera man was efficiently setting up his apparatus.

"I said that, Bert, and I meant it."

"And not a half hour after you talked with me, you were over in the Fourth Precinct jail talking to Soupy Joe Gorlish—after you'd faithfully promised that you wouldn't go near him!"

"I didn't promise I wouldn't go near him, Bert," said Gillian, in a controlled voice. "What I promised was that I would not take his case."

"Well, what do you call what you're doing?" Mr. Yistle angrily wanted to know. "You hire this young fellow here"—he pointed graphically to Buck Brampingham—"and then you take him over to see Soupy Joe, and Soupy retains him as counsel for the defense. Kindly put all that together and make it spell something innocent, will you?"

Out of the tail of his eye, Gillian saw that Vee had gone quite pale, and he knew that he would hear about this dinner party for a long time to come.

"The main trouble with this world," Gillian said, "is that things are so often not what they seem. It is true that this young man is to defend Soupy Joe, but it is not true that I have hired him as my assistant—or in any capacity whatsoever. He is a free agent—"

"A minister plenipotentiary, so to speak," sneered Mr. Yistle, "without portfolio."

"Not at all," said Gillian pleasantly. "He has no connection, official or unofficial, with my firm. I have merely told him that if he wins this case, I will make him my assistant. Until he wins the case, there is no bond of any kind between us. Go fishing, Bert, with an easy mind. You know that I am a man of my word."

Mr. Yistle seemed embarrassed. It was as if his social error, in intruding here like a bull in a china shop, was just dawning upon him. But his suspicions were not yet stilled. His eyes still flashed with anger, and his face still flamed.

"Do you mean to tell me that, with this interest you have in him, you will not help him in any way—in the slightest way—in his defense?"

"I would be spoiling the purpose of my plan," Gillian acknowledged, "if I helped him in any way. If he can win

that case without my help, he will have proved what I would like to see him prove. Why don't we have an understanding on this, Bert? You let young Thurbo here conduct the prosecution absolutely without your aid, and I will let Brampingham conduct the defense absolutely without my aid. Make it a fair fight."

"Not even hints or suggestions?" said Mr. Yistle.

"Not even hints or suggestions," Gillian confirmed. "Go away and catch your fish. I will be in the court room, but only as a spectator."

"Is that an absolute promise?"

"Supposing we bind it," Gillian snapped, "with a thousand-dollar side bet."

"Don't be a piker," snorted Mr. Yistle, "make it five thousand!"

"Let's get entirely out of pin money," said Gillian. "I'm betting you ten thousand that my man wins this fight."

"That's covered," snapped the district attorney.

"It seems to me," broke in the golden young man, "that Soupy Joe is nothing but a pawn. Is this trial a fight between me and Jake, or is it the attempt to find our way through a mesh of lying evidence to the truth in the case?"

No one paid any attention to this rhetoric, for at that moment a soft, hissing, puff-like explosion occurred. It was accompanied simultaneously by a flash of white light. A blue-white cloud of smoke was floating serenely up through the trees toward the evening sky. And the photographer was inserting another plate in his camera.

Gillian glanced at Vee. Her face was quite white, and there was a queer, hard light in her emerald eyes.

Mr. Yistle was saying: "All right, Gill, I'll leave to-night for the old fishing hole. Jake, you are to conduct your prosecution without help from any one. And I want you to win this case."

"Yes, sir; I'll win it, too," said the dark young athlete.

Mr. Yistle apologized to Vee for his intrusion and departed. Jack Sniffen, the reporter, now boldly took possession of the situation. He said to Brampingham:

"You're Angel Face Brampingham, aren't you, buddy?" And to Jake Thurbo: "You're Bulldog Thurbo, aren't you?" And when due acknowledgment had been made: "Will you step this way, gents?"

"What for?" snapped Bulldog Thurbo.

"To get your pitchers taken, of course. Stand up, boys, and stand right over here. Get ready, Gin."

"I am ready," said the photographer.

"We call him Gin," the reporter explained graciously to Vee, "because it flows in his veins."

Under his masterful directions, Angel Face Brampingham and Bulldog Thurbo arose. They were not accustomed to the rawhide tactics of modern journalism.

"Now, you boys stand face to face, and raise your dukes."

"What for?" asked Bulldog Thurbo.

"Nemmind what for, buddy! Stick 'em up. Strike your fighting poses, both of you! Look tough, Angel Face. Look like you're going to chew him up and spit him out for the pigs. That's better!"

"F-s-s-boom!" said the flash light.

"Got it?" asked Mr. Sniffen.

"Sure, I got it," responded the character known as Gin. "I always get it.

Did you ever know me not to get it, you sap?"

"Now, that little lady over there. Come this way, miss. Oh, don't give me that haughty stare, Miss Parr. If you don't play ball with me I'm going to run a little story about that country club party last week when you jumped into the pool with all your clothes on—even if your old man does have me canned. 'At a girl! This way, Parr.'"

Jane Parr, furiously pink, arose and joined the two dazed gladiators. She blazed: "Can't one of you men do something about these insolent creatures?"

"Get that expression, Gin!" The flash light flashed. "Good!"

"Now, stand between the two boys and put a hand on each shoulder."

Jane meekly obeyed. She, too, was crushed by the modern steam roller of journalism.

"NOW, boys," said the brazen reporter, after several group photographs had been taken, "I want to get the true story of this feud from both of you at once. Don't be afraid to talk. Remember, a frank, free, full confession will save me from making it up and getting it full of mistakes."

"There isn't any feud," stated Angel Face.

"We're the best of friends," corroborated Bulldog.

"That's a lotta hooley," said the reporter. "You hated each other all the way through State University. You both fell hard at the junior prom for this Parr girl. And if it wasn't for her, you wouldn't be in this town this minute. You had her up for the prom, didn't you, Angel Face? And you tried to cut him out, didn't you, Bulldog? Speak right up, boys. I want

the lowdown on this. Bulldog came hornin' in, didn't he, Angel Face, and tried to beat your time?"

"He happened to meet her the same evening," the golden-haired youth admitted.

"Was there a law against it?" demanded the Bulldog.

Gillian nodded. He knew that he would never hear the end of it from Vee, but he was delighted that the combatants had finally drawn their swords. But Angel Face disappointed him. He put his sword back by saying:

"Mr. Thurbo had a perfect right to dance with Miss Parr as much as he pleased that evening."

"Isn't it true," persisted the reporter, "that when Jake was voted the man most likely to succeed in his class, you said to several of your classmates: 'He'll make a success as a burglar'?"

"What if I did?" growled Angel Face.

"Did you say that?" demanded Bulldog Thurbo belligerently.

"Sure, he did!" cried the reporter. "And what was it you said about him, Bulldog, when the class voted him the handsomest fella? Didn't you say to your gang: 'He ought to make a wonderful chorus man'?"

"I still say it!"

"That's a rotten crack!" declared Angel Face.

"But it's true!"

"And it's true that you'd make good as a burglar—and nothing much else!" The reporter cried: "Get that, Gin!"

The flash light flashed. But the two young men did not grapple and roll upon the lawn. They faced each other with balled fists and twitching nostrils. And again the flash light flashed.

"And this is true, too, isn't it?" demanded the reporter. "Aren't you going to let the outcome of the trial de-

cide which of the two you're gonna marry, Parr?"

"My name is Miss Parr."

"My mistake. How about it, kid?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Well, you will in to-morrow morning's *Mirror*. Is it true, or isn't it?"

"I refuse to answer your questions."

"Your loss, kid. I am only trying to be helpful."

At this, Vee laughed a little hysterically. She said: "Gillian, will you request these men to go? Unless I'm mistaken," she added with bitter irony, "they are annoying our guests."

"Annoying us!" quoted Jane. "I could slay both of them."

"You won't let me quote you on that, *Miss Parr*?" persisted the journalist.

"I won't let you quote me on anything. You are manufacturing a story out of absolutely nothing."

"I'll bet my city editor won't think so. All right, Gin; let's hit the grit."

The two representatives of the press departed. And the dinner party promptly became an indignation meeting, conducted personally and with lively feeling by Jane Parr.

Gillian took no part. He sat back and admired Jane and decided that the man who won her would be fortunate indeed. He liked girls who fought back.

"Why," she demanded, "didn't one of you two big, hulking men break them over your knees? Standing there like two frightened puppies! I never saw such a disgusting exhibition!"

The two young men looked squelched. Vee was her gracious self, but she was pale, and Gillian shuddered for the moment when they would be alone that night.

"It strikes me," Angel Face Brampingham finally boomed in his deep, melodious voice, "that a lot of fuss is being made about non-essentials. Nobody seems to be interested in whether Soupy Joe did or did not kill the Viaretto girl. All I've heard so far is whether Jake or I will win a fight in a court room. Where does justice come in?"

"It seldom comes in," said Gillian quickly, "except when it limps in with the aid of a smart lawyer."

"Then it is just a fight?"

"That's all."

Angel Face looked at Gillian in silence for a great many seconds, as if he were searching for the whereabouts of Gillian's soul. He said presently, in a low, thoughtful, rather sad voice:

"I see." And, as if in echo: "I see."

Gillian doubted it. He was more firmly convinced than ever that Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham saw nothing of realities, that he still clung to that pathetic idealistic conception of justice as a beautiful, if blind, lady in flowing snowy robes who, through some mysterious and magical process, rewarded the good and punished the wicked.

That attitude was the wrong attitude to take to a murder trial.

In short, the famous attorney felt that Angel Face Brampingham was whipped before he entered the arena.

CHAPTER VI.

A BEDROOM CONFERENCE.

HER gracious, charming self up to the moment of her last guest's departure, Vee Hazeltine promptly became cool, remote and incommunicative. With her firm little chin up, she started up the stairs.

Gillian knew that he was pale. He was conscious of a vague, inner discomfort. In another man, it would have been fear. His hand trembled. His mouth tasted slightly dry.

This red-haired girl, who came hardly to his shoulder, had the power to reduce him to this!

He reflected: "Let her stay sore! Where's her sense of humor?"

But he followed her up the stairs and into their bedroom. In ominous silence, Vee seated herself on the edge of the bed and peeled off one silver stocking and then the other.

Gillian stood over her with the expression of a naughty boy who hopes that the punishment won't be too severe. He cleared his throat, but he dared say nothing.

With set lips and glimmering emerald eyes, the beautiful red-head proceeded with her undressing, elaborately paying no attention to him.

He stood by the bed, waiting the return of her majesty's speech.

Vee presently donned jade-green chiffon pyjamas and seated herself at her dressing-table. She began to brush her beautiful hair. At length she spoke. In a rigid voice she said:

"You married me to have a charming hostess to preside over your social functions, not to referee prize fights or to entertain visiting tramps."

"I married you," Gillian stated firmly, "because I was absolutely mad about you."

"This dinner party was the most humiliating experience I have ever suffered."

She was on the verge of tears. Now, there was this to be said for Vee's use of tears in dealing with her husband. She did not employ them, as do so many women, to gain an unfair victory over a man when all other means fail.

She fought squarely. Her tears were a result, and not a cause.

"I did not realize that I was putting you in such an unpleasant position, darling," Gillian hurriedly said. "I am very sorry I was so thoughtless."

Vee swung about. She was not equipped with red hair for nothing.

"Thoughtless!" she cried. "You never do anything thoughtlessly. That is what hurts so. You planned every move of it with that diabolical cleverness of yours. You wanted those boys to quarrel. You sent for those—those unspeakable newspaper men. You knew exactly what would happen."

"I thought you would think it was amusing, honey."

"You know how I hate brawls."

Gillian hung his head. She read him always with clairvoyant ease. It was useless to argue with Vee, because she was always right. And Vee never argued unless she knew what she was talking about.

"Darling, I'm sorry. I was inconsiderate. I do like brawls. I love 'em. But that wasn't why I put on this show to-night. I am anxious to give the son of old Bill Brampingham a trial. I am anxious to put him to every possible test. I wanted you to study him under various conditions, because I have the highest opinion of your judgment of men. I am badly in need of an assistant. You always help me with anything I undertake, and I hoped you'd see the purpose behind every piece of unpleasantness to-night."

"Jane Parr will talk."

"NO, she won't, sweetheart; she's hard-boiled, and she's in this as deep as we are. Right this minute, if she's home, she's working on Old Man Parr to telephone the editor of the *Mirror* to kill that story."

"Why don't *you* make him kill it? It's the least you can do."

"Because I want that story to run. I want this trial to get plenty of publicity. The more people attend it, the more difficult it will be for those two young roosters. The harder I can make it for them, the better I will like it."

Vee arose. Her emerald eyes were still moist. Her red mouth was soft and tremulous. In the green chiffon pyjamas she was so slender, so small, that Gillian was overcome by sudden guilt.

He said huskily: "I'm sorry I hurt your feelings, Vee. My main interest in life is to please you. If I displease you—shucks, what's the use?"

His red-head reached up, took his head in her two hands, and quickly kissed him.

"Mother understands. You simply can't resist staging battles. I liked your golden-haired youth very much. Is that what you wanted me to say?"

Gillian's remorse made him reply: "I should think a fine, lovely woman like you would prefer to be married to some wholesome-minded man like him."

"This beautiful woman is perfectly happy in her present matrimonial state. Now, stop pouting and let's talk business."

Gillian picked her up, seated himself on the dressing-table chair, and sat the red-head on his lap.

"What's your impression of Angel Face?"

"I told you, darling. I like him very much. Otherwise, I agree with you. Several times during—well, let's pretend it was dinner—I detected that gooey idealist. And I agree that if there is not a hard-fisted fighting man behind that angelic countenance, he will never make good in criminal law.

I agree also that nothing but a sordid, dramatic trial will bring out his true nature. I noticed how he reacted under punishment—always the peacemaker."

"How about Thurbo?"

"A hard young man."

"Has he a soul, Vee?"

"I can't decide. Jane is asking the same question. What Jane is looking for is another Gillian Hazeltine—she didn't fool me for a moment. You're a two-fisted fighter with a soul."

"But I give vulgar exhibitions."

"You're forgiven, my sweet. I know—O Robin Hood—that it was for a good purpose."

"Thank you, Vee."

"The idealism of Sphinx Angel Face Buck Montmorency Wilberton Brampingham blinds him to the real issue whenever it arises—that court rooms are no longer halls of justice, but scenes of battle, and that trials are won, not by right triumphing over wrong, but by a clever lawyer out-smarting a lawyer not so clever. The defendants and witnesses are actors cut out of shiny paper."

"Yes," said Gillian emphatically, for that was his creed.

The beautiful red-head said: "This evening ends just where it began, with a question: Is the golden man a hopeless, impractical idealist, or a two-fisted criminal lawyer? I can't answer it."

GILLIAN nodded. "Jake Thurbo is tough. I don't think the golden angel has a chance. I like him—I like him immensely, but I think he is going to be humiliated and disgraced and beaten in that trial."

"I'd love to see you disappointed, darling. And I'd love to see you win that ten thousand from Bert Yistle."

"I'm afraid," said Gillian sadly, "I've lost that bet before the trial opens."

The bedside telephone rang. Gillian answered it. The voice at the other end was that of Jane's father, Bob Parr, president of the First National and chairman of the board of the Greenboro Steel Mills.

"Gillian, my daughter has just come clean with the details of a plot that makes my hair stand on end—what there is left of it to stand on end. It's the first time in years she has consulted me about anything. She's told me about everything—these two lawyers who are fighting over her, your dinner party to-night, and the forthcoming murder trial. The last time I looked at that daughter of mine, I'll swear she was ten years old. I now discover that she is a grown woman with the instincts of a Cleopatra, a Catherine of Russia, with the high political methods of a Lucrezia Borgia thrown in for fair measure. As my attorney, will you kindly advise me what to do?"

"What," Gillian answered, "does Jane want you to do?"

"Force the editor of the *Mirror* to kill that story."

"What are you inclined to do, Bob?"

"Let her stew in her own juice!"

"Then let her stew."

"But I don't want her to be hurt, Gill. And I don't want her name to be dragged through these rotten tabloids in connection with this Viaretto murder. I've been so busy the past ten years that I haven't had time to grow acquainted with Jane. I don't know her."

"I do," said Gillian. "I met her for the first time when she was ten, and I don't believe she has changed. She was hanging by a fence nail that had

somehow become affixed to the seat of her pants. Jane had been stealing ox-heart cherries from an ox-heart cherry tree.

"Just as I lifted her off the nail, the owner of the tree came over the fence with a barrel stave. The case was settled out of court. She wasn't spanked. I received one wet kiss as a fee. At a safe distance she yelled that she loved me and that the cherry tree proprietor could go to hell."

"And she's been in love with you ever since," murmured Vee with conviction.

Gillian professed not to hear this. He said: "I am certain, Bob, that the *Mirror* story will create no situation that Jane cannot handle. Nor will the Viaretto trial. She is not only spunky, she has a brain that she isn't in the least afraid to use, a fine sense of discrimination, and sound judgment."

The banker emitted a skeptical grunt. "Her sense of discrimination doesn't seem to have done much for us so far. Why doesn't she pick the petals off a daisy or say eenie-meenie-minie-mo? My candid opinion is that she has made up her mind on one of these two young men, but is staging this Roman holiday for the kick she can get out of it. I don't understand these modern girls at all, Gillian."

"Did any father in any age since the time of Adam," Gillian asked, "understand his daughter?"

They said good-by and hung up. Gillian turned from the phone with a complacent smile to find Vee's dazzling green eyes mysteriously upon him. He knew what generally went with that look, and he became a trifle—or rather more than a trifle—uneasy.

"Did any man in any age since Adam," she drawled, "really understand any woman?"

The great lawyer cleared his throat, but found no answer.

CHAPTER VII.

A DILEMMA AND A TEST.

THE more or less innocent cause of all this excitement was meanwhile endeavoring in her own sweet way to solve a baffling problem; but Jane Parr was neither picking petals from a daisy nor reciting eenie-meenie-minie-mo.

She was lodged in the seat of a sleek roadster beside Bulldog Thurbo. The roadster was parked under an elm tree above the Sangamo River.

Grimly, the young man was stating his position. He slipped his arm about her shoulder. By fair means or foul, he declared, he was going to win that case.

"And," said Jane, "I am merely a sort of prize."

"Well, that's your proposition, isn't it?"

His arm about her shoulder tightened. Jane remained relaxed. She believed in the theory of non-resistance when dealing with men. Put up a fight, and they loved it. Remain limp and utterly unresponsive and they didn't know what it was all about. It was much more discouraging than a slap in the face.

"I'm not putting it in the form of a proposition," said Jane.

"If I win that case," stated Bulldog Thurbo, "you're going to marry me. I'm going a long way in this town, Jane. I need some one like you. With your social connections and my ability—"

"Your brains and my beauty—" Jane mocked him.

"Stop kidding me."

5 A

"Then stop acting like a human steam roller. Isn't the moon on that water simply divine?"

"I believe in smashing my enemies. I'm going to smash that Angel Face the way a steam roller smashes a robin's egg."

"And you love me, do you, Jake?"

"I want to marry you, don't I?"

"Yes, Jake; you do. Isn't that a cute little star over there on that hill?"

"Why not marry me now? Look, Jane. In ten years I'm going to be governor of this State. I've got my eyes on the White House. Nothing in this world is going to stop me from getting what I want."

"And you want me—you really do?"

"Yes. And I'm going to have you."

"Even if I don't want you?"

"Love isn't everything!"

"Jake, won't you tell me what the moon on the water reminds you of?"

"Silver," said Jake. "Money. I'm going to be one of the richest men in America some day, Janie."

"How," asked Janie determinedly, "about that little star?"

"That's what I'm saying. Hitch your wagon to a star—me. You'll never regret it. You'll have everything. I'm going to be rich and famous. I'm going to be one of the men who run this country."

"Let's go home," said Jane. She didn't doubt for a moment that Jake would some day be one of the men who ran the country. He was the kind of hard-fisted, hard-boiled men who did run the country. But did she necessarily want to marry that kind? It would be fun helping a great man if you loved him. But it wouldn't be much fun being married to a human steam roller without a soul.

Under the *porte-cochère* in front of

her house, Jake tried to kiss Jane. But she was prepared for this. She sprang the latch and slipped out, so that his sweeping arms enclosed nothingness.

She ran up the steps and inquired sweetly: "Will I be seeing you at the country club dance Saturday?"

Disgruntled, Jake growled: "Who're you going with?"

"Buck."

"Listen," said Jake; "when I get through with that white-haired boy in the Viaretto trial, you'll be ashamed to be seen anywhere with him. I'm going to show him up for just what he is—a sap of the first water!"

"Good night," sang Jane, and ran into the house.

IMMEDIATELY she went to the telephone and called Buck at his boarding house.

In a soft whisper: "Buck, what are you doing?"

"Going over some stuff for the Viaretto case—and thinking of you."

"Too busy to see me?"

"Isn't it pretty late?"

"Is it, Buck?"

"Not if you say it isn't."

"Is that mechanical sardine can of yours still percolating?"

"It still hits on an occasional cylinder. Shall I come right out?"

"If you really want to."

His approach was heralded some twenty minutes later by the wheezing, rattling and clanking of a Model T Ford roadster of the earliest coinage. This conveyance came lurching into the immaculate, crushed bluestone driveway and stopped with a shudder and a hiss under the *porte-cochère*.

Jane climbed in beside the hatless young man.

"Let's drive out the Red Rock Road."

He obeyed. A few miles out the Red Rock Road, under a great elm tree, she commanded him to stop. The moon was lower in the west, and it had acquired ruddy tints from the lower atmospheric layers. It now spread upon the Sangamo River a carpet of softly glowing gold.

Buck Brampingham slipped his arm tentatively over the back of the seat behind Jane and said with a deep, contented sigh:

"Golly, this is beautiful!"

"I shouldn't have interrupted you at your work."

"There'll never be a time when you shouldn't interrupt me at my work. You're more important to me than all the work in the world."

"But you want to be successful."

"I want you to be happy. What a night this is! Jane, do you see that little star up there, sitting on top of that maple tree? I'd like to climb that tree and pick that star and put it in your hair."

Jane sighed. "You do love me, don't you, Buck?"

"I've always loved you. The very moment I met you, I adored you. How could any man help loving you?"

"But why, Buck? Why do you love me?"

"One doesn't analyze love," the young man answered. "I love you because I love you. But I can tell why I admire you and like you. Because you're such a spunky little devil and such a straight shooter. I need somebody like you. I dream too much."

"About the big things you're going to do?"

He was looking at the golden carpet on the Sangamo. His "Yes" was vague and remote.

"Tell me about them."

"Well," he said, shifting his gaze

to the star in the tree top. "I'm going to be governor of this State. That's one dream. And beyond that—there's the White House. I'd like to see you in both places, Jane. You'd be charming in the White House."

"What makes you think you're going to get there?"

"Faith."

"Do you honestly think you'll beat Jake in this Viaretto trial?"

"I'm certain I will."

"Why?"

"Same answer, Jane: Faith."

"**B**UT aren't you afraid of Jake's steam-roller methods?"

"No; because I'm certain of my client's innocence."

"If you win that case, will you expect me to marry you?"

"Not necessarily. If you marry me, you will do it because you're in love with me. You wouldn't marry a man on any other basis."

"Do you really believe that?"

"I know it, Jane. That's why I admire you. You're a straight shooter. I believe in you."

"You have faith in me."

"That's it."

Faith! In other words, ideals. Wheels within wheels.

"But you're going into that court room, aren't you, Buck, to fight and show me that I should have more faith in you?"

"What happens in that court room," he answered, "doesn't concern us—in spite of what happened at dinner to-night. We both know that. You're either going to love me and admit it or you aren't. I've waited four years."

"Aren't you impatient?"

"Certainly! If I win this case, Mr. Hazeltine will take me in as his assistant. Then I'll be making enough money

to support you. I want to give you everything. I don't blame you for waiting until I can support you. Jane, I want to lay everything in the world at your feet."

"And pin stars in my hair?"

"I will—diamonds! There isn't a thing I'm doing that isn't for you."

"Hadn't you better get back and work on your case?"

"The devil with that case! I'd rather sit here with you than win all the cases on the calendar!"

"You say one moment that the case is unimportant, and the next that your winning it would win you a job with enough money to marry me, and now you say it isn't important. Aren't you contradicting yourself?"

He laughed. "You have a logical mind, Jane. So have I—in court. But on a night like this, with that moon up there, and that river shining in the valley and you sitting beside me—"

"In the wilderness?"

"—I can't think of anything else but you."

"And picking stars to put in my hair!"

He laughed again. His shoulder was touching hers. His arm had slipped down about her. For a moment, Jane was afraid that he was going to kiss her. If he kissed her, Jane knew that she would weaken. She fought off an impulse to let her head fall back against his shoulder. She didn't want to weaken. She said crisply:

"Let's go home. It's getting late."

That shining faith of his, like that of a knight in armor setting forth on a crusade—would it withstand the steam-roller onslaughts of Jake Thurbo? Jane knew herself too well to weaken. She was too practical to be married to an impractical idealist. She would never be satisfied as the

wife of a man without some hardness, some strong ambition. She wanted to be proud of her man.

The moon test had proved nothing. She liked Jake Turbo, the modern steam roller. And she liked Monty Brampingham, the knight in shining armor. Would the trial of Soupy Joe Gorlish decide which man she would marry?

CHAPTER VIII.

A NETWORK OF LIES.

JANE PARR sat in the front row of chairs reserved for witnesses and visiting attorneys. Gillian, grave and alert, occupied the chair to her right. Jane had never been in court before and was thrilled by even the minor processes of legal machinery. She was disappointed in the court room itself and in the character of the court attendants. The room was old and shabby and sordid; it smelled depressingly of dust and unwashed humanity, while the attendants were crabbed-looking old men.

She had not been present when the jury was impaneled, because she had been unable to get in. On the morning when the jury drawing began, the courthouse was surrounded by a dense, milling mob. Gillian's scheme for giving the trial all possible publicity had been so successful that the trial of Soupy Joe Gorlish was already being referred to by the tabloid press as "the trial of the century," the tabloid press having forgotten that this was the fourth or fifth trial so designated in the past five years.

So successful was Gillian's publicity campaign that it was necessary to call out the riot squad to handle the crowds. Long before dawn of the

first day, it began to gather. Later in the morning, limousines and smart roadsters began to arrive. The trial of Soupy Joe Gorlish had become a social occasion. "Everybody" was going to be there to watch the advertised fight between the two handsome young lawyers.

As soon as the doors were thrown open, the police were swept aside in a stampede of dowagers and dishwashers, débutantes and dubious ladies of Greenboro's underworld, polo players and truck drivers, golfers in plus-fours and stevedores in overalls. Only a small portion of the mob could crowd into the court room.

More than an hour was required to restore any semblance of order. When Gillian, with a crowd of reporters, news photographers and artists tried to get in, there was no room for them. The monster they had created all but trampled them underfoot.

On the second day of the trial it was necessary to issue tickets for all seats. With a police guard at every door and policemen sprinkled through the disappointed mob in the halls, on the steps and in Courthouse Square, order was maintained. The preparations for the trial of Soupy Joe Gorlish now went forward smoothly, and Jane Parr enjoyed thrill upon thrill.

There were two long tables a few feet apart in front of the bench, and at one were the assistant district attorney and a clerk from his office, while at the other, his golden hair rumpled, his handsome face pale, sat the counsel for the defense—alone.

There was a murmur of interest in the court room as two sheriffs appeared at a door near the bench with a small, rabbit-faced prisoner between them. Jane recognized him instantly from numerous photographs which the

newspapers had published of the man who would stand trial for the murder of Rosie Viaretto.

Soupy Joe, it seemed to Jane, fixed his weak eyes appealingly on her, while his lips moved. She felt uncomfortable until she realized that the prisoner was staring not at her but at some one beside her.

For the first time Jane became aware that the girl who occupied the seat on her left, the girl who had been sniffing and wiping her eyes with a cheap handkerchief, was the young woman who had been recently competing with her for newspaper attention—Sophie Klemm, the five-and-ten-cent-store clerk with whom Soupy was—or was reputed to be—in love.

JANE would have dismissed Sophie Klemm with one glance as being cheap and common, but now she looked at the clerk with a new and sympathetic interest. From Sophie Klemm, Jane looked at Soupy Joe, with his white, lined face, his slightly bald head, his weak eyes, weak mouth and weak chin. What could Sophie see in such a man? Love, she reflected, was wonderful, when it could blind a girl to such imperfections in a man.

On the other hand, what did Soupy Joe see in Sophie? She was not pretty, and she too had a weak, soft mouth and a weak chin. Her nose was red from weeping; her cheap bright-blue hat had obviously been put on without any regard for how it looked. Her dress was cheap and shabby, her shoes were run over at the heels. And she loved Soupy enough to cry for him!

Jane thought that something ought to be done about it; decided in the next breath that she would do something about it. Later she would at least have a talk with Sophie Klemm.

Soupy Joe was conducted by the sheriffs to the prisoner's pen, and Jake Turbo sent a messenger to inform the judge that he was ready. "Bulldog" Turbo looked more like a bulldog than he ever had before. His dark young face was flushed with eagerness; his eyes glowed with excitement, and his powerful chin seemed to have acquired new prominence.

A door behind the bench opened, and Judge Lasky came in.

Everybody in the court room stood up as the judge took his place on the bench. To Jane he looked cruel. He had a thin, mean face, and he wore thick, gold-rimmed spectacles, behind which small gray eyes peered out. Jane knew that he was an important factor against the counsel for the defense. Judge Lasky was a firm believer in capital punishment; his justice was tempered by a hard disapproval of unfortunates like Soupy Joe.

He nodded curtly to Jake, ignored Buck, and gazed out over the crowded room.

A bailiff was droning:

"*Oyes! Oyes! Oyes!* The Superior Court within and for Greenboro County, criminal term, is open and in session at this place. All persons having cause or action who are summoned to appear herein will give attention according to law."

Judge Lasky said, "You may call the jury," and a sheriff hastened to obey. Thereupon twelve good men and true filed in and took their seats in the jury box.

The names of the jurors were called, and the jurors answered the roll call until all twelve were accounted for. Jane thought they were a dull and stupid-looking lot. Most of them were frowning importantly, as if trying to make the judge and the lawyers and

the men at the press table realize how heavily responsibility sat upon their shoulders.

Jane recalled what Gillian Hazeltine had said on the night of the dinner party:

"Justice seldom comes into a court room except when she limps in with the aid of a smart lawyer."

Would Monty Brampingham prove to be a smart enough lawyer?

The clerk now read the charge. It alone, Jane thought, was sufficient to condemn Soupy Joe to the electric chair.

"NUMBER four thousand, two hundred and ten," read the clerk in a singsong voice. "To the Superior Court for Greenboro County comes Adelbert Yistle, attorney for the State in said county, and on his oath of office, complaint and information makes that on the fourth day of June, Joseph Gorlish, of the town of Greenboro, in said county, with force of arms did enter an establishment known as Dad's Coffee House, at 124 River Street, in the said town, at or about nine o'clock in the evening, and did deliberately and with premeditation fire two bullets from an automatic pistol into the brain of one Rose Viaretto, so that the said Rose Viaretto did languish and suffer and did, within a lapse of minutes, die, so that the said Joseph Gorlish did then and there commit the crime of first-degree homicide against the peace of the people of the State and their dignity and contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided."

The singsong voice stopped. Buck Brampingham was on his feet, huskily pleading not guilty to the charge. Jane Parr, looking at him as he stood there,

slim and straight and tall and somehow out of place in this sordid, dirty room, wondered if he had the strength to resist the ruthless attack which Jake Thurbo was about to make upon him.

The prisoner was now taken from the pen and seated beside his attorney, and the contrast was so striking that a murmur arose—a murmur of amusement. Soupy Joe was so frightened, so small, so ratty, so pale; the man beside him, with his tanned face and golden hair, so much like a knight at bay.

The judge asked curtly: "Is the State ready?"

"Yes, your honor."

"Is the defense ready?"

"Yes, your honor."

"The State will proceed."

"Here," whispered Gillian to Jane, "comes the bulldog. Hark—a snarl!"

Jake Thurbo had arisen and was facing the jury. To Jane, who was something of a fight fan, it was as if the bell for the first round had rung. His voice, staccato and harsh, very much like the blows of fists on flesh:

"Gentlemen of the jury, you are confronted by the necessity of righting a dreadful wrong. You see, seated at that table yonder, a terrified rat of a man, a man who has been brought before this tribunal, accused of the blackest of all crimes known to our civilization—that of taking the life of a fellow being.

"It is my duty, as the acting State's attorney, to prove to you beyond a reasonable doubt that that terrified rat of a man did, with premeditation, with careful thought, deliberately take the life of the woman known as Rose Viaretto; that, having taken her life, he heartlessly proceeded to rob that still warm corpse of the gems with which she—"

"Objection!" said the husky voice of Buck Brampingham.

Judge Lasky glared at him.

"What are your grounds, Mr. Brampingham?"

"His statement is summation!"

"Good for Buck!" murmured Jane.

"That," Gillian informed her, "was perfunctory. He'll be overruled."

"OVERRULED," growled the bench.

"I further object, your honor, on the grounds that the robbery of the corpse, which constitutes a felony, was not set forth in the charge as read."

"I shall prove," snapped Jake Thurbo, "that the robbery of the corpse constituted a contributing factor to the crime of murder; that it furnished a motive."

"Objection is overruled," growled Judge Lasky. "You will proceed with your address, Mr. Thurbo."

"That wasn't fair," said Jane to Gillian.

"Whose side are you on?" Gillian grinned at her.

"I'm absolutely neutral!"

"You're feeling every blow Jake lands in Buck's ribs. You're siding with Buck. So am I. Pipe down, you wild cat. This is going to be a fast trial—and hot! And how!"

"That having taken Rose Viaretto's life," the dark young district attorney was saying, "he heartlessly proceeded to rob the still warm corpse of the gems with which she adorned herself—a fortune in sapphires. Where are those sapphires? Perhaps we will never know. But we will know, gentlemen of the jury, before this trial is over, who stole those gems."

"Before this trial is over, gentlemen, we will know beyond any reason-

able doubt that the man who fired the two shots which brought to an untimely end the life of that beautiful woman, that glorious woman, known so well among the poor and needy of this town as the Rose of the Ghetto, who was loved and admired and esteemed for her goodness, her Christian charity—we will know, gentlemen of the jury, that the man who fired the two bullets into the brain of the beautiful, benevolent, glorious woman known as Rose Viaretto, was—"

The assistant district attorney's voice came to a dramatic pause as he whirled about and flung an accusing finger at Soupy Joe Gorlish. Then it rose to thundering heights as he concluded:

"—that skulking little rat, that odious little human vermin—that white-faced ex-convict sitting over there!"

Buck was on his feet, with a protesting hand raised.

"Your honor, I most strenuously object to the strong language my esteemed colleague is employing in referring to the accused. Above all, I object to this reference to him as an ex-convict."

Judge Lasky bent his short-sighted gaze upon the jury.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I should perhaps point out to you that in a court of law no man's past record as a criminal may be brought as evidence against him unless he himself takes the stand." The bench glanced at Jake Thurbo. "Does the State withdraw its reference to the criminal past of the accused?"

"Yes, your honor; the State humbly withdraws the reference."

"That," said Gillian, "can be regarded as a nice, stiff body punch. Soupy's criminal past is not a part of

the record, but it is nicely planted in the jury's mind."

Jane was angry. "Look, Gillian. All those things Jake said about beautiful, glorious Rose Viaretto were lies. She was nothing but a common, vulgar, little gold digger."

GILLIAN gave her a cynical glance. "If you are looking for truth, Miss Diogenes, take your lantern out of this court room. Jake is naturally setting out to prove that a glorious specimen of womankind was killed by a despicable human rat."

"And will Buck set out to prove that a common, vulgar woman was killed by a glorious specimen of manhood—Soupy?"

"I don't know what Buck's defense will be. And I am dying with curiosity."

Jane thought it was rather superfluous to have to prove that Rose Viaretto was dead, but evidently it had to be done. And Jake Thurbo's first witness was Dr. Bartrom, the coroner of Greenboro. He stated briefly, in response to Jake's questions, that Rose Viaretto had died almost instantly, her brain having been entered at the medulla oblongata by two .45 caliber automatic pistol bullets.

Jake asked questions in a low, growling voice. He paced up and down beside his table like a caged panther.

"I beg your honor's permission to introduce as Exhibit A for the State a drawing done to scale showing the back room of the establishment known as Dad's Coffee House, showing where the Viaretto girl was seated when she was killed, showing entrances and windows, and the arrangements of the room generally."

He unrolled a large square sheet of

white paper on which was a drawing in black ink resembling the floor plan in an architect's drawing.

Judge Lasky bent his thick lenses on Buck.

"Has the counsel for the defense any objection to the introduction of this exhibit by the State as material evidence?"

"No, your honor; I am familiar with the drawing."

"One wonders how 'familiar,' Gillian whispered, as if to himself.

Jane bent forward. She could not see the drawing. Jake was holding it up so that the coroner and the jury could see it.

Jake explained the drawing in his hard, vigorous voice.

"This black line is the wall surrounding the room. These little white spaces are windows; the larger ones, doors. The circles are tables at which customers sat. The circle nearest this window is the table at which Rose Viaretto was seated when she was shot and almost instantly killed. Dr. Bartrom, do you recognize that room as the one you visited on the night of June 4th?"

"I do."

"You were called there, were you not, to examine the body of a woman found dead?"

"I was."

Dr. Bartrom seemed nervous. He was a sad-looking man with long drooping black mustache and a deep hollow voice. His fingers on his knees were twitching, as was also his mustache. He looked as if he were afraid; and Jane wondered if he, too, were lying.

"Kindly tell the jury who she was," directed the assistant district attorney.

"She was Rose Viaretto."

"She was dead?"

"She was; yes, sir."

"Kindly describe to the jury how, in your professional opinion, her death was caused."

"Her death was caused," responded the witness, "by the entrance into her brain of two bullets, either of which would have caused immediate death."

"Where did these bullets enter her brain?"

"At the medulla oblongata."

"That is at the base of the brain—back here?" Jake Thurbo tapped the back of his head near the neck.

"Yes, sir; that's it."

AND the position in which her body was found by you indicated, did it not, that she had been seated in this chair marked *A*; that is, with her back to this window, marked *D*?"

"Yes, sir; that's the way I figured it out."

"So that it would be safe to say, as you examined the room, that the bullets by which Rose Viaretto was sent to her death were fired from window *D* as she sat in chair *A*?"

"Objection," whispered Gillian.

"I object to that, your honor," cried the counsel for defense, "on the grounds that it is presumptive."

"Sustained," ruled the bench.

"Good!" sighed Jane.

Gillian shot a smiling glance at her. "Still neutral, I see?"

"It's the first break Buck has had," Jane argued.

"He'll need them all."

Jake Thurbo said to the coroner: "How long after the murder occurred, Dr. Bartrom, did you make this examination?"

"I should say about half an hour."

"Could you say that the body had been moved or tampered with?"

"It seemed to me that the body had simply slumped forward out of the chair and to the floor. But I think the body had been tampered with in a way. One of the ears was slightly torn at the lobe, which indicated to me that an earring or an ear pendant of some kind had been forcibly removed from it."

"Wasn't one of the fingers slightly cut where a ring had been forcibly removed?"

"Yes, sir, it was."

"Do you recall, doctor, whether the window marked *D* in this diagram was open when you made your examination?"

"I do. It was open."

"Then you assumed, did you, doctor, that the murderer had fired his bullets from that window into the back of Rose Via—"

"Objection," barked Buck. "Assumptions are not admissible as evidence."

"Sustained," ruled the bench.

Jane turned radiant eyes on Gillian.

"Wasn't that smart?"

"Nope," said Gillian. "It was mere routine. Buck knows that Jake is following a straight line. He is trying what any dumb lawyer would try—to break that line before its sets."

"Is the coroner lying?"

"Probably."

Jane sighed and sat up straighter, and her eyes became brighter. She glanced at the sniffing, red-nosed girl beside her, then at the golden-haired counsel for the defense. Gillian Hazeltine was right. She wasn't neutral. She wanted Buck to win.

Jake was saying: "Doctor, did you at once probe for the bullets?"

"I did."

"And found them?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do with them?"

"I turned them over to Sergeant Detective Walsh of the homicide squad."

JAKE nodded. "That will be all, doctor. Counsel for the defense may take the witness for cross-examination."

Buck arose and walked toward the coroner and looked at him intently.

"Doctor," he said, in his rich, deep voice, "who was in that room when you were conducting your post-mortem?"

Jake barked: "I object! Question is irrelevant."

"Upheld," snapped Judge Lasky.

"That will be all," said the golden young man.

Jake Thurbo turned about and grinned at Jane. Her smile in return was wan. She asked Gillian if Jake had gained a point then.

"He proved a point," Gillian answered. "Buck wanted to find out

whether or not the judge was against him. The question was a test question. The judge is against him. The judge is down on all poor devils like Soupy—and he is a close friend of Bert Yistle's. I think our golden-haired lad has a tough fight ahead of him."

"Next witness!" snapped Judge Lasky.

Jake barked: "Professor Whitby!"

"That settles it," said Gillian.

"Professor Whitby is a firearms expert. He will prove that the bullets found in Rosie's head were fired from a certain revolver, and some other witness will prove that the revolver was Soupy Joe's. If you will listen carefully, my dear, you will hear the sound of nails being driven into Soupy Joe's coffin—and the crumbling sound will be that of the golden lad's hopes falling to earth, never to rise again!"

"Lies, lies, lies!" Jane rebelled.

"With a sugar-coating of truth—just enough sugar to make them slide down easily. Is Buck licked? Watch!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



Watering the Sahara

"AS dry as the Sahara" has become a proverb, but if some engineers succeed in carrying out their ideas, they will irrigate a part of that great desert. A company has already been formed and is studying the plan's practicability.

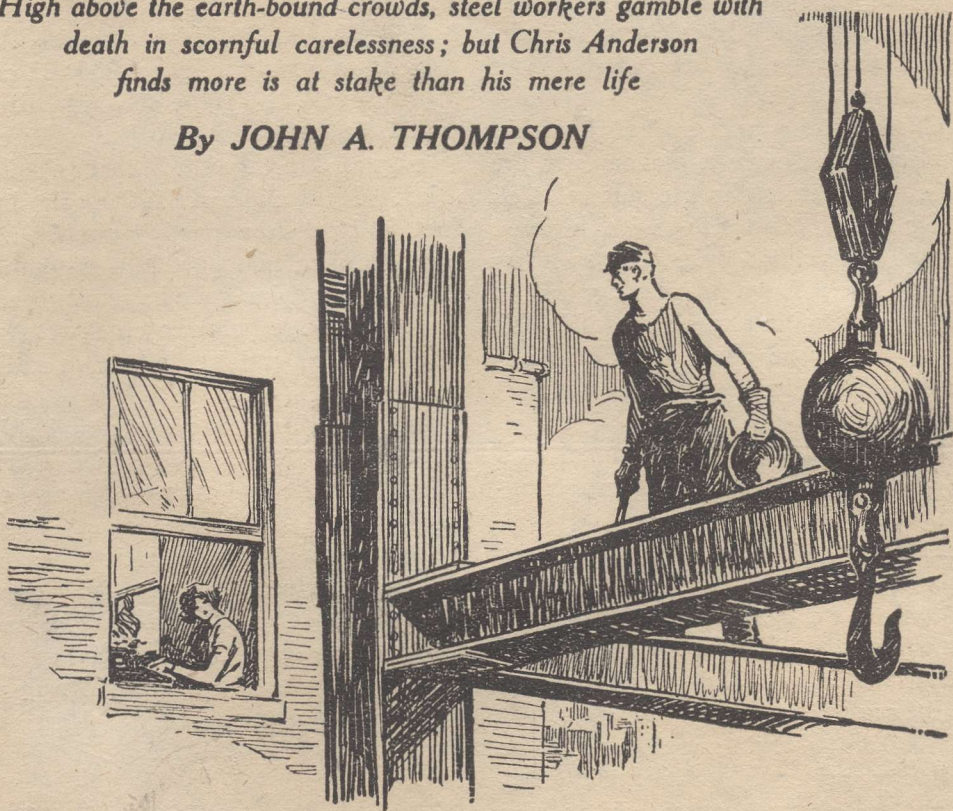
It seems that a large area of the desert in southern Tunis and Algeria is actually below the level of the sea, and the digging of canals from the Mediterranean would allow the sea to flow in. The engineers would like to flood about sixty thousand square miles of this area, creating a vast inland lake twice the size of Lake Superior. It is expected that such a large area of water will produce changes in the surrounding regions and increase the rainfall and supply of water for irrigation. If such proves the case the new fertile areas will provide homes for millions of people and produce new wealth in wheat, corn, cotton, and sugar cane for export to Europe. Northern Africa will again become the granary of Europe as it was in Roman days.

John H. Spicer.

Sky Birds

High above the earth-bound crowds, steel workers gamble with death in scornful carelessness; but Chris Anderson finds more is at stake than his mere life

By JOHN A. THOMPSON



He turned to his private audience for approval

BIG BILL KANE'S heavy fist shot upward in a swift parabola. The blow was well-timed, perfectly aimed and forceful. Chris Anderson caught it on the point of his Nordic chin and toppled over backwards, landing at the edge of the staging laid across the skeleton girders of what was ultimately to be the fortieth floor of a new skyscraper.

Kane glared at Chris, and spat juicily to leeward.

"You'll do," he snapped, the knotted veins on his thick bull neck standing out like cords of steel wire as a result of his recent exertions.

Big Bill, barrel-chested, square-jawed, hard as iron, had pushed a gang of steel workers for twelve years; and no tougher or better gang than his ever walked the top flange of an eight-inch I-beam. It was Kane's boast that he could lick any man that ever worked for him. He had just been demonstrating to the latest recruit that the claim was no idle figment of his imagination.

Still, it had taken more than a bit of doing to whip Chris Anderson. Kane was panting, his face flushed and red.

"Call yourself a passer, huh?" he

roared at the prostrate figure on the planking. "We'll damn well soon see. When I go anywhere, everybody goes, savvy? And they trot the beams. No plantin' your canal boats on the lower flange and walkin' bow-legged with the iron between your knees."

"Okay, chief."

Chris sat up and rubbed his chin tenderly. He stole a glance over the side. Far below him the sidewalks of lower Manhattan teemed with dwarfed human beings that looked like so many small black bugs swarming along. Chris was smiling as he scrambled to his feet. To be taken into Big Bill's outfit meant you were one of the best in the game.

Kane stood over by a channel iron column and surveyed the new man approvingly.

Pretty tall, this guy Anderson. Superbly built. Looked strong as an ox, quick as a tiger. Broad nose, generous mouth. Bright blue eyes and blond hair that stood up from his forehead in a flaxen wave.

His habitual expression seemed to be a happy grin. Kane judged Chris would be about twenty-five or six, nearly fifteen years younger than he was himself.

For the moment a scowl shadowed the veteran pusher's stern face. Big Bill was touchy about age. He never liked to think that he was getting old for a game in which few men last long.

The gang was working two stories above the staging. Scorning the ladders, the new man rode the hook up. One foot in the big hook, the other thrown loosely around the heavy iron weight ball, his left arm clasped tightly around the shackle of the iron sheaves through which the steel cables ran to the derrick boom and his right arm swinging free, Chris let the derrick

swing him out over airy emptiness and deposit him at the working front of the "operation," as all big construction jobs are called.

KANE watched him ascend. Almost grudgingly he nodded approval of the blond-haired youngster's style and physique. Later, a vague doubt passed through his mind. He wondered if the grinning fool had taken a pasting simply because he wanted to get into the gang. Then with a grim smile he remembered that last sledge hammer crack to Anderson's chin and he felt more satisfied.

But the doubt recurred; and Big Bill began riding the genial Chris harder than he had ever ridden any of his men.

Chris didn't seem to notice that he was being driven unmercifully. Hard work never stumped him, and he had attained his ambition. Whether he could humble his foreman in a fist fight or not was something that didn't matter at all to Chris. At least it didn't matter at first.

Work on the new Braden Building progressed with bonus-earning rapidity. Kane's crowd set the pace. Big Bill's gang functioned like well-drilled troops, every man an expert at his own particular job.

First the hooker-up secured the derrick hook to a girder. The boom swung. Cables tautened and whined as the big iron beam was lifted free and started on its way aloft. The tag line man, a massive Swede named Jorgenson and a giant for strength, would lean back on the rope attached to the hook, steadying the swaying beam on its dizzy ascent.

Jorgenson guided the beam close to position and the stick man, walking

cross-foot along a six inch girder, bulled the new iron into its seat with a clumsy length of three by four.

Once in place, the connectors took charge of the beam, jamming the butts of their wrenches into the bolt holes and awaiting the arrival of the hissing, red-hot rivets passed into position by Chris.

Among steel workers the passer's job is to catch those heavy, sizzling bolts flung upward with incredible speed and accuracy by a furnace man standing on the staging below. The furnace man generally cranks his forge with one hand and hurls his rivets from long tongs held in the other.

Grinning pleasantly, Chris held a battered iron bucket in his right hand and snagged the red-hots as they were tossed up to him. He should have been able to qualify on any big league infield. Leaning against a fifty-mile breeze, feet planted firmly on the top flange of an I-beam, empty space above, below, and all around him, Chris could snare the flying rivets in his pail whether they came at him high, low, close to the body, overhead or wide to one side. The faster they came the better he liked it. Sometimes he called strikes and balls on the furnace man.

This aerial game of catch with a pail for a glove and hot iron projectiles for balls was thrilling work to Chris. He liked it. He was a natural born sky bird. And he was quick as greased lightning. The tongs he held in his left hand would clamp on a bolt he had just snagged, sweep it out of the bucket and slap it into a gaping bolt hole all in one swift movement.

Chris swung his right arm out at full length. *Kerplunk!* A glowing six-inch rivet landed in his bucket.

"Ball two!" he shouted passing the

rivet into a bolt hole. Then he turned for a smile of approval from a private audience consisting of one beautiful girl who sat at her desk near the window of an office in a tall building adjacent to the plot on which the new skyscraper was being erected.

THE girl was about level with Anderson's position and as Kane's gang were working on the outside framework close to the other building, the distance between Chris and his audience was only a few feet. Alone among the office workers on that side of the building, the girl seemed not to mind the ear-splitting racket of riveters. At any rate she was often by the window watching Chris.

Abstractedly Chris thought she was a pippin. He never expected to meet her.

"Hey, muttonhead!" yelled the furnace man down below. He was ready to throw another hissing bolt up. "What are yuh doin'—mopin'?"

Zing! He aimed the red-hot for Anderson's bucket.

Chris snagged it deftly. "Strike one!" he called, grinning.

Big Bill was down on the staging. He heard the furnace man and stepped over toward him briskly.

"What's the matter, Jake?" The big pusher thrust his chin forward dangerously. "That new passer loafin' on the job?"

"Oh, the guy's a good egg." Jake stirred the coals in his forge slowly. "But he's got some jane in one o' them windows next door that he's kiddin' with."

"Oh, yeah?" There was a dull menace in Kane's voice that fore-shadowed trouble for Chris.

It was one of Big Bill's iron-bound rules that his men refrain from play-

ing to the gallery. He was not going to have complaints of flirting lodged against any of his men; and above all, years of experience had taught him that men whose principal sphere of activity was a narrow strip of steel hundreds of feet in the air must not let their minds wander. Tragic accidents to themselves and their comrades were apt to occur.

Kane went for the ladders and climbed to the level on which Chris was working. He strode along the I-beam angrily, fists doubled. He was so intent on the tongue-lacing he was going to mete out to his new passer that he didn't notice the sizzling, white-hot bolt that the furnace man sent hurtling through the air until Kane neared Chris.

"Look out!" shouted Chris, his bucket swinging in front of the pusher's head, and snagging the missile.

Kane ducked, almost lost his balance and sat down hard straddling the girder. His feet dangled below him and his hands clasped the top flange.

He directed a stream of grade A profanity at the astonished furnace man. Chris grinned and looked over his shoulder toward the offices. The window at which he smiled was closed, and the girl was laughing.

Chris put his bucket down and stretched out a hand for Big Bill to grasp. Though the boss was a heavy man, the passer pulled him to his feet as if he had been a little child.

"You blinkety-blanked idiot," roared Kane. "What do you mean tryin' to knock me off that girder with your damned bucket?"

"Me, chief?" Chris smiled pleasantly. "I was just saving you from catching a red-hot in the solar plexus."

"Yeah?" snapped Kane. "Well, don't throw that pail in my face again.

And listen, smart guy, what I come up here for was to tell you to lay off flirtin' with the stenos, see?"

"Me, chief?" Chris looked hurt. "You mean me?"

Chris couldn't resist the temptation to turn around and see if his audience was watching. She was. Chris winked, and the girl turned her face away but not before Kane had caught a glimpse of her.

THAT brief glimpse was sufficient for recognition. Big Bill's face went livid with rage. Every fiber in his body seemed to tremble with anger. He brought his fist up, shook it threateningly under Anderson's nose.

"Why you—you—!" Kane sputtered but he couldn't find a word expressive enough to complete the phrase. "That's Helen Arnberg, John Arnberg's girl, the daughter of the general foreman on this job; and you—"

Unexpectedly Chris felt a little wave of disappointment sweep over him in that sudden thought that perhaps it was the general progress of the job that the girl had been watching and not him personally.

"Sap," he muttered to himself, "what would a swell dame like her see in a broad-nosed bohunk like you anyhow?"

"Listen, homely," Kane rasped, "you lay off flirtin'. Understand?" went on Kane. "And that goes double for Helen Arnberg."

"Aw, pipe down, big boy, pipe down!" replied Chris. Being called homely at that particular moment had a nasty sting to it.

Kane grunted and his right fist shot forward like a released steel spring. Chris ducked the blow and backed along the I-beam, his mind working quickly. A fight up there on the girder

would be just as dangerous for Kane as it would for him.

Kane must be crazy mad. Chris knew he'd be out of steel working for good if he knocked his pusher off that girder, even though the latter had started the brawl. Steel working was life itself to Chris. At the risk of being called yellow, he angrily and reluctantly backed further along to the end of I-beam.

Kane followed him. When Chris felt his toes reach the end of the girder he stopped.

"Now you gotta fight, you yellow louse," snarled Kane.

Men working on near-by beams paused to shout warningly to Big Bill but he paid no heed. Tense, they watched the drama that was about to be enacted by the two men. It could have, they were certain, but one conclusion — tragedy. Either Chris or Kane, maybe both of them, would go hurtling to a mangled, broken death on the pavement hundreds of feet below.

Suddenly the steel workers gasped. They were used to daring of a high order, but their hearts were in their mouths, as their eyes followed Anderson.

Chris had turned. His back was toward Kane and he faced the end of the I-beam. Five feet away and below him was a swaying girder being hoisted up into place to join the beam on which he was standing.

Without a moment's hesitation Chris jumped. His feet landed on the top flange of the eight-inch beam, slipped as he lunged forward and his hands clutched the slings that held the girder to the hook at the end of the derrick cables. He steadied himself a second, regained his footing and looked back. He was grinning amiably.

Up on the end of the beam above

him, Kane shook his fist and mouthed curses, but an involuntary cheer rose from the steel workers.

"Are you coming, chief?" called back Chris.

Big Bill Kane, who had always insisted that his men go wherever he went, declined the invitation to follow his passer's lead.

The pusher walked slowly back along the beam on which he stood and went down the ladders to the staging.

LATER Chris was explaining to the brawny tag line man how the whole thing had started.

Jorgenson put his hand on Anderson's shoulder in a friendly gesture. "Blondy," he said solemnly, "you're foolin' with dynamite. Helen Arnberg is Kane's best girl. He's nuts over her."

Chris swore. A moment later: "How about the girl—does she like him?"

"I dunno, boy," said Jorgenson. "He takes her to the movies a lot."

"Yeah?" said Chris.

Christian Hans Anderson, passer, made it a point to hang around the little portable shack on the ground floor, field office for the construction company. He kidded along with the timekeepers and got in John Arnberg's way several times before he achieved his objective.

It was after working hours. Nearly everybody had gone home, or was getting ready to do so, when a trim little figure in a neatly tailored suit and a tight-fitting hat set at a saucy angle over a head of golden brown hair stepped toward the shack.

Chris felt his heart skip a beat. There she was, but he didn't know what to do. Awkwardly he moved out of her way.

Her father stepped out of the shack. He exchanged greetings with his daughter, then saw Chris.

"Lo, Anderson. Want to see me about something? Make it snappy."

"Yes, sir—I mean no, sir. I—I was just waiting for somebody," stammered Chris.

"Well, don't hang around the shack. They make the pay roll up inside at times, you know. It looks bad," said Arnberg.

He started to move away. It was Helen who came boldly to Anderson's assistance.

"Why, father," she exclaimed as if she hadn't known it all the time, "isn't that the man who made that wonderful jump? I—I'd like to meet him, please."

Chris felt his heart swell like a baked potato. The girl was smiling at him and he read something deeper than mere amusement in her flashing dark eyes.

"Wonderful jump, rot!" snapped Helen's father. "A foolhardy stunt, that's all."

Obviously the general foreman had not been told the truth concerning the origin of Anderson's famous leap. Chris knew this was no time to explain.

"It was a wonderful jump, father," insisted the girl. "I saw the whole thing." Though she was speaking to her father, her eyes were directed toward Chris.

"We won't argue the question," snapped John Arnberg. He hastily introduced Chris and Helen. The formality was brief, the handshake briefer. "Come on, Helen. I'm hungry. Let's get started for home."

"Which way do you go, Mr. Anderson?" asked Helen. "Can't we take you to the nearest subway in the car?"

On the ground Chris was not naturally a quick thinker, but for once in his life he had a brilliant inspiration. He knew the Arnbergs lived on Long Island, not very far out. Flushing, he thought.

"I—I'm rooming out in Long Island City now," he said quickly.

"Good," said Helen. "That's on our way; we can take you over there."

John Arnberg nodded. It was immaterial to him and he had the decency to climb into the back seat. Besides, he wanted to read his evening paper and there was more room to spread it out.

Helen weaved the big car expertly through the maze of homeward bound traffic. For a long while Chris sat very silent at her side, his brows wrinkled. He was wondering what kind of luck he could ever hope to have when he had begun by lying to her.

He ceased worrying by the time the car reached the Fifty-Ninth Street bridge and sped from Manhattan across to Queens. Helen and he were chatting merrily together, and he at least was oblivious to time or distance.

Suddenly the girl turned to him. "Goodness," she exclaimed, "we're nearly out of Long Island City. Do you live way out here?"

Chris swallowed hard. "Me?... Yes, sure. Let me out—at the next block, please. I can walk from there."

Chris thanked Mr. Arnberg and his daughter for the lift. He had enjoyed the ride, he said. He watched the car swing on down the road, then turned to hunt the nearest rapid transit station that would take him into New York.

CHRIS was sorry when advancing work on the Braden building brought him above the range of Helen Arnberg's window. But he didn't have much time to think about

it. Open enmity had broken out between him and Big Bill Kane, and though rivalry over the girl was only part of the cause, it was an important part.

In lots of little ways Kane tried to discredit Chris. He urged the connectors to keep heckling him for more bolts, to get in his way whenever they could. He tried to bribe Jake to throw the red-hots a trifle wild and with all the stinging force he could muster.

But Jake was an old furnace man. He had been too long in the racket, he explained, to change his style of rivet tossing.

Matters weren't improved when Arnberg turned on the pusher one night.

"Good Lord, Bill!" exclaimed the general foreman, "that's entirely up to Helen. I'm not going to force her to marry anybody. She knows I like you."

"She's too young. She doesn't know her own mind, that's all," snapped Bill. It was a weak alibi and Kane knew in his heart that Helen Arnberg knew her own mind only too well.

He blamed Chris and again the haunting fear that he was getting old crept into his eyes. "Damn it," he muttered to himself, "I can whip every one of the younger men under me. I've done it and I'll do it again."

He decided that in the morning he'd start in on Chris Anderson.

Big Bill was patient, but he was accustomed to getting what he wanted. Chris Anderson was the obstacle.

Kane curled his lips in a sneer. Why, the man was yellow. Hadn't he risked a crazy jump rather than fight him up on that beam? Big Bill's fists opened and shut, opened and shut spasmodically. He'd lick Chris again and in one stroke restore his own morale and

discredit the passer in the eyes of Helen. He knew Helen liked strong men.

For two days he badgered Chris about the beams, but Anderson managed to postpone a fight with his boss.

The third day was pay day. Kane's gang was going to work overtime so the paymaster, instead of waiting for the men to come down to Arnberg's office, bundled his pay roll list under one arm, tucked his steel safe-deposit box with the pay envelopes in it under his other and took the material hoist to the highest staging. He refused to go any farther. The men working on the beams above him had to climb down and get it.

ARNBERG was on the staging. So was Big Bill Kane. Chris was down there, too, talking to Jake the furnace man and waiting for another keg of bolts to come up from below.

The paymaster put his lists and his money box down on a girder. He looked around for a table. There was none. Arnberg sent down for the table in his office and Kane began calling his men in off the beams.

He was standing by the box with the pay envelopes in it. The box was closed, but unlocked. No one but Chris was very near him yet.

All Kane's jealousy, envy and hatred of the younger man seemed suddenly to surge over him like a monstrous wave. With it came an unaccustomed cunning. His brain fired with a new idea, a trick that would not only discredit Chris, but would brand him as a crook and a fool as well. He glanced about furtively. It was done in a moment. His long fingers had dipped into the paymaster's box and seized some of the pay envelopes.

He moved quickly up to Chris. Jostling the passer from behind, he managed to slip most of the envelopes into Anderson's overalls. A few caught awkwardly against the cloth as Chris moved away, half turning his head to see who had bumped into him. Chris evidently thought the pusher was trying to pick an open quarrel with him again and that was all.

Kane had palmed the few envelopes that he hadn't got into Chris's pocket, and took another step toward Chris. He had to get rid of the rest of the envelopes he had taken, had to plant them on Chris. He was about to stretch his hand out when his men arrived at the foot of the ladders and began to swarm across the staging.

Afraid some of them might see him, he hastily thrust the rest of the envelopes into his own pocket, waiting for a break that would afford him an opportunity of planting them on Chris later, or returning them to the cash box.

It was just then that the material lift arrived with the table. Kane's gang, laughing, joking as usual when about to receive their weekly wages, clustered quickly round the table. In the press of men, Kane found himself unable to get close to Chris without attracting too much attention. He bit his lips and waited.

The paymaster opened his box, looked at it a moment in amazement, then whispered something to Arnberg. The general foreman's face went red, then white. He tried to control himself.

"Boys," he announced solemnly, "whoever took the pay envelopes that are missing from this box was very foolish, very foolish indeed. The money was all there when we left the office. Half of it is gone now. Some

one on this staging took it. No one will be paid and no one will leave this level until the thief confesses. Is that understood?"

THE men looked at each other blankly, foolishly. A murmur of resentment arose. Kane's gang were hard men, but no one had ever before called any of them thieves. Nobody spoke to Arnberg. The general foreman bit his lips. He waited for thirty tense seconds.

"Very well," he said calmly, "since the crook hasn't nerve enough to step forward, line the men up, Kane. Line them up in front of this table. I'll ask them point-blank, one at a time."

The men shuffled angrily into position. Arnberg started at the left end of the line.

"Jorgenson, did you take that money?"

"No, sir."

"O'Brien?"

"No, damn it! What do you think I am?"

Arnberg went on down the line. Suddenly Kane interrupted. A smile of satisfaction wreathed his face.

"I think I can put a hand on our man," he said. "It's the new passer, Chris Anderson."

Chris set his lips. For once the grin left his face.

"You mean you think I took the damn money, Kane?" he snapped.

"Think it? Hell, I know it," barked Kane. Triumphantly he reached in Anderson's overalls and pulled out some of the missing envelopes.

The men were dumfounded. Arnberg was speechless for a minute. He looked at the clean-cut, clear-eyed Chris. It seemed unbelievable that he would attempt such a thing. Then the general foreman remembered the day

his daughter had given the passer a lift home.

Chris had certainly been hanging around the office that time, while men inside were making up a pay roll.

The general foreman's eyes went cold as ice. He ordered two men to seize and hold Chris. He told Kane to search him. The pusher responded with alacrity.

"I'd ought to paste you in the nose, you dirty skunk," snarled Kane.

Outraged innocence flooded Anderson's heart, clogged his reeling brain. He lost his head completely and did the worst thing he could have done under the circumstances. He broke away from the men who held him and ran.

Being a natural born sky bird, he ran upward, climbing the ladders with incredible speed until he reached the highest crossbeam. Kane took up the chase. This was his day to be a hero and he was not going to share any of the glory with any one.

The paymaster drew a small automatic out of his pocket and fired at Chris as the latter ran along the top flange of a narrow six-inch I-beam that jutted out over some five hundred feet of nothingness below.

Kane heard the shots. He turned, saw the deadly determination in the face of the paymaster and little beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. He hadn't expected this new development, nor had he included the murder of Chris in his plans.

"Hey!" he shouted down to the paymaster, "cut out that shootin'. I'll get him and bring him down. He can't go much farther without a parachute anyhow."

Down below, the men looked up and gasped at the thrilling chase that was taking place along the narrow I-beams.

They marveled at Anderson's speed, his sure-footedness.

"Damned bird, he is. Look at him hop along," declared Jake.

"Yeah," said somebody else, "and Big Bill's right behind him. They don't make pushers no better than Bill."

Kane was right. Chris hadn't far to go. He reached the end of the farthest beam. This time there was no swinging girder hung from a derrick boom below him.

Chris turned defiantly.

"Come clean, crook, come clean," snarled Kane, "or I'll knock you off your perch."

"You know I didn't touch that money, Kane," snapped Chris, anger darting from his pale blue eyes.

Swish! Kane made a pass at Chris. The latter stepped back, then realized as one foot swung over emptiness that he couldn't afford to retreat. He doubled his fists and moved forward, boring into Kane's stomach with fierce, short body blows. Kane returned the cracks. A straight to the chin sent Chris reeling, but he didn't fall.

Lips set in a tight line, he aimed a swift uppercut at Kane, heard the bulky man grunt; then daylight disappeared in a shower of sparks as Kane's fist caught him between the eyes.

DOWN below the men held their breath. Never before had they seen such a fierce, hair-raising struggle as was being put up by those two men who stood their ground on a six-inch beam high above the world and swapped vicious, man-killing blows.

There was no room on the narrow beam for them to skip and dance, lunge and feint. The two antagonists simply stood up to each other and let their

fists work like windmills, each hoping he could give a little better than he was being forced to take.

The pace was lightning fast. Blood streamed from Anderson's face. One eye was closing rapidly. His feet seemed to be slipping off the top flange continually. But he kept on grimly. Once and for all the question as to whether he or Kane was the better man was going to be settled.

Kane panted like a grampus. The body blows told on him. He was chunkier than Chris, but twice he had almost slipped and fallen, jarred by a sudden uppercut, and once a wild swing had thrown him off balance, nearly carried him overboard.

Chris could have clipped him on the side of the head then and sent him spinning to instant death on the hard pavement hundreds of feet below. But the passer had held his blows, waited a moment till Kane was firm on his feet again.

Then the two went at it, hammer and tongs. The men below could hear the sickening thud of knotted fist on muscled flesh as Kane and Chris battled in a death struggle out on the end of that narrow I-beam.

Suddenly Kane seemed to stiffen, to summon all his reserve strength for a final blow. His right arm drew back, paused a second, and shot forward like a thunderbolt.

Chris threw up his left guard, caught the punch on his elbow. His own right went out swift as the flight of a falcon. Kane doubled up, his legs folded under him and he dropped to the I-beam. His heavy body rolled off and with the sudden feeling of nothing but space beneath him, every last instinct of self-preservation rose up in him. He clutched at the top flange, gripped it till his knuckles showed white under

the flesh and there he hung, his heavy body dangling over space. The fight was ended.

Chris might have stepped on his knuckles. Kane would have been forced to let go, would have dropped to his doom. Even as it was he couldn't hope to hang on long.

Anderson looked at him a moment. Then he straddled the I-beam, clamped his feet firmly on the lower flange and bent over to boost, tug and haul in an effort to get the pusher back on the girder. For a while it seemed as if he, too, must be carried over the side by Kane's sheer dead weight.

His struggle brought the men below to their senses, startled them out of their paralyzed inactivity. Three or four rushed up the ladders. They reached Chris just as he had hauled Kane back to comparative safety. Too exhausted to move, the passer clung weakly to the I-beam with one hand, his other steadying Kane, keeping him from slipping over the edge again.

The men got the derrick boom around and lowered Chris and Kane to the staging in a sling. Kane lay on the ground, moaning weakly. Chris stood up, but he was dizzy and he swayed from side to side.

"Anderson," said Arnberg, "you did a brave thing to hang onto Kane and get him back to safety the way you did, when it would have been so easy to—do otherwise." He paused a moment.

"But," he went on, "that does not alter the charge against you. I have sent for a policeman. You are under arrest, unless, of course, you produce the rest of the money you stole."

Chris looked about him blankly.

"I—I can't do that," he stammered. "I haven't got it."

"You're a fool!" said Arnberg

sternly. "I've given you your chance, Anderson."

THE material lift came up. A uniformed policeman stepped out. So did Helen Arnberg. She had grown tired of waiting for her father down below.

"There's your man, officer," said Arnberg. He pointed to Chris.

It was Helen's sharp eyes that saw the corner of a small manila pay envelope protruding from Kane's trouser pocket. She went over and snatched it out.

"Is this what you're looking for, dad?" she said.

A cry of surprise escaped the general foreman's lips. Arnberg strode over to Kane.

"I—yeah, I took the stuff. Sorry, John... I've been a fool. I was goin' to put it back," muttered Kane. "I—just wanted to get the kid in wrong, in wrong with Helen especially, but I guess— The kid saved my life when he could have sent me tumblin' straight to hell, an' he whipped me on a six-inch I-beam... I guess—"

In spite of what he had done, a little wave of pity for the pusher swept over Helen Arnberg. She knew he was trying to admit Chris was the better man, but pride was choking the words in his mouth.

She bent over Big Bill gently. "It

was silly of you to think anything you could do would change my feelings toward Chris," she said quietly. "Don't you see that, Bill? Besides, Chris and I settled things last night."

Helen Arnberg tossed her shapely head with pride as she held up her left hand for Kane's inspection. An obviously new diamond solitaire set in platinum flashed on her engagement finger. Kane stared at it, blinked and suddenly sat bolt upright.

"Well, whadda you know 'bout that?" he exclaimed. He fished in his pockets for the rest of the pay envelopes and turned to his men.

"Boys," he said, his old tone of command coming back to him, "Chris here and Miss Arnberg are gettin' hitched. Half o' my pay this week goes to start a nest egg for the happy couple. And remember, you guys, when I goes anywheres, my gang does likewise. Whadda you say?"

"Half my dough for the weddin' fund," sang out Jorgenson.

"Same here!" said Jake, the furnace man.

"Me, too!" shouted a confusion of voices.

Kane looked over at the general foreman. "Say, Arnberg," he snapped brusquely. "Know what you can do? Make the kid a pusher and let him get a crew of his own. He's too damn tough for me."

THE END.





"Bill!" Donna gasped pathetically, "You're going to hit me!"

Moving Day

With only a few hours of grace in which to scare up enough money for his honeymoon, the too gallant young real estate man, William Gwynn, moves heaven and earth—and a vanload of a blond vamp's furniture

By EDGAR FRANKLIN

Author of "Every Minute Counts," "Now We're Rich," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WILLIAM GWYNN, attractive and rather too gallant young real estate man, finds himself in a bad jam when his fiancée, frightened at his attentions to other girls at a dance the evening before, insists that he must elope with her that evening—far ahead of the date set for their wedding. He seems to have inherited the Don Juan reputation of his late cousin, Peter Spofford.

The firm of Gwynn & Little is financially involved; and to his horror he finds that the New York capitalist Morson, who has his private securities in a deposit box, will be out of town for weeks.

Desperate, he tries vainly to scrape up \$2,000 by evening to buy a roadster and finance his honeymoon—and he dares not scrimp, for June Stannard is wealthy.

This story began in the *Argosy* for July 5.

In the midst of his frenzied efforts to borrow, he has to reclaim a moving van which his firm had sold on commission to a deadbeat, and deliver it to its owner, Grober.

On his way with the van, he is stopped by a cry of distress; and little blond Mrs. Worth, who had aroused June's jealousy the night before, begs him to help her move her furniture. Between compassion and flattery she cajoles him into letting workmen load it into the van—and his troubles begin. Seeking refuge from a terrific thunderstorm, William drives to the cottage that is to be his and June's. Grober drives up, in search of his van; sees it loaded, angrily charges Gwynn with appropriating it, and orders his men to unload the furniture into this house and take away the truck.

CHAPTER IX.

ONLY TOO WELL SETTLED.

NOT for the first time that day, William Gwynn discovered that his breath had stopped. Not for the first time, he struggled hard to regain it, but seconds had passed before he was capable of a wild:

"Well—here! Here! You can't do that!"

The Grober smile became slightly bored.

"No? Who's stopping me? You?"

"I—certainly! That furniture doesn't belong here and—say, you, Jimmy! I forbid you to touch that load! Get away from the door of that van!"

Jimmy glanced at his employer, who nodded and barked, "Snap into it! Snap into it!" Then, throwing back his great shoulders and wriggling them suggestively, Grober spoke directly to

Mr. Gwynn. "If you want a couple socks in the jaw, interfere with them boys, kid! That's my van and what I say about that van goes!"

"Well, but—why, Grober, don't you see, this furniture—I don't know what the devil's the matter with you, but this furniture—"

"That'll be all right, handsome. I ain't gone crazy; I'm just gettin' back one laugh for some you've been havin' on me, usin' my van for your own business. You can figger it out your own way, gettin' your stuff away again—see?" And he swung around toward his men and raised his great voice with: "Hey! What t'hell's the matter with you guys? Asleep?"

A sort of creeping paralysis was upon William now. For a little space, he merely stood and watched the muscular men as they swung piece after piece to the ground, taking no thought as to varnished surfaces and tossing mirrors about with as gay abandon as if they were made of armor plate; watched Grober, too, standing there with his great arms folded and sinister humor curling his thick lips.

Decidedly, he had been mistaken in this Grober!

Not ten minutes ago, William had thought of the man as a fine, strapping, genial fellow, even handsome in his rugged way, grown worthily rich by reason of native shrewdness and unsparing effort. But as William now perceived with photographic vividness, the creature was actually of a type lower than the better class of ape, whose money probably had come to him by sheer luck or through channels even less admirable, who was more treacherous than any snake in his utterly stupid thirst for vengeance; a man to whom the reasoning power of

a subnormal five-year-old child had been denied.

"Hey!" William gasped. "He cracked that little divan almost in two!"

"That's up to you, Gwynn," said Grober. "I never gave you no authority to put the junk on my van."

William's teeth clicked together, cutting off the heated response. Something would have to be done about all this, and at once! But just what? As a mere matter of inclination, nothing would have pleased him more than to sail into Grober and thrash him within an inch of his life!

But there were objections to that. While William never yet had ducked a fight, but Mr. Grober had sent at least two professional fighters and several rough-and-tumble opponents to hospital cots and plaster casts; and he had three aides at hand. No, a senseless Mr. Gwynn, stretched bruised and bleeding on the wet bluestone drive, was not likely to help matters.

But if adequate brawn was lacking, some brain at least survived. William stepped forward and tapped John Grober's arm and spoke in his best sharp business manner: "Grober! This is an outrageous thing you're doing and—"

"Aw, shut up!" said Mr. Grober and yawned widely, impolitely at him. "What's on your mind, Jimmy?"

JIMMY, who looked like a once respectable gunman sunk now to lower and less lovely forms of crime, jerked a thumb toward the house and spoke almost sternly.

"The little lady in there, boss. She's kinder upset."

"What's that to me?"

"You'd orter square it with her, boss. She's cryin' in there and she's—"

"This guy 'll square it," Grober said uninterestedly and indicated William. "Don't stand there shootin' off your face at me. Get busy!"

He turned his back upon William. He glowered at his henchmen, spurring them to even greater effort. And William, standing there behind him, knew a sudden great desire, which was that he might take himself off in a corner and kick himself repeatedly; for, not to put too fine a point upon it, he was just plain thick!

With a smooth, secure bridge to walk across, he was floundering about in the whirlpool! With guns and ammunition in his very hands, he was allowing the enemy, figuratively speaking, to kick him all over the map. For just within that pretty house was the most potent of all influences upon unruly men—Donna!

Why that hadn't occurred to him in the very beginning, he couldn't say, but it had occurred to him now, and that was enough. William, without even one glance at the unknowingly defeated Grober, strode through the side door and all but collided with Donna Worth, who was at the time seeking to struggle past two men with a bureau.

She was wild eyed and bewildered and tears streamed down her lovely cheeks. She caught at William's hand and held it tight as she stammered:

"B-Bill! What is it? What's happening here? Why did you tell them to move in here?"

"I didn't. I—"

"Because I—I can't move in here like this! Don't you see? I can't possibly, Bill! Not—not right here, I mean. Not in this neighborhood, so near."

"All right," William grinned, soothingly. "We'll be moved out again in

a few minutes, if we don't waste too much time now. Let's go upstairs; I want to talk to you in a hurry."

There was furniture upstairs. Beds were piled in bedrooms and so were chairs and bureaus; books and a radio set, several cameras and a smoking stand had been hurled into the little nook William meant to use as a den; but there was a trunk in there as well and to it William drew Donna, still sobbing aimlessly.

"You'll have to stop crying, honey, and listen hard, because we haven't any too much time," he said swiftly. "This—all this—is just a dumb mistake, of course. Grober, the man out there, thinks I'm using his van to make money and this is his way of getting back at me. See?"

"I—suppose so."

"Well, you don't have to see, because it doesn't matter. Point is, I've tried to make him stop and leave the stuff on the van, and I can't. But you can!"

"How, Bill?"

"How?" demanded William. "How did you get me to take it on in the first place?"

And she was bright, bless her little heart! She understood perfectly, without any more details. She was dimpling up at William and the sun was shining again through the mists about her gorgeous eyes.

"All right, Bill," she said. "I'll try. Why didn't you tell me before they began to rush things in like that? Why, the frame of my Chippendale mirror's broken right across and my two old fiddle-back chairs, and they've simply ruined—"

"I know. We'll have to fix that up afterward. Will you come down with me now?"

"Like this?" Donna cried.

"Like what?"

"With my face all streaked and my eyes red and everything. No, Bill. But I'll be ready in a minute or two. Where's my bag? Oh, I have it."

SHE hurried away toward the bathroom. William, seated upon the trunk, merely waited. Water seemed to be running endlessly in there. He heard the crackling sound as Donna opened a hamper and surmised that she was hunting one of her own towels. And time was passing and passing and, down below there, things were being banged around in a way that suggested at least one hundred dollars for floor refinishing before ever the William Gwynns could move in here. And time continued to pass.

"Oh, Bill!" floated to him.

"Yes?"

"Got a comb in your pocket?"

"No," said William. "Aren't you—er—about ready now?"

"Never mind. I've found mine. Just two shakes now, Bill. Why don't you go down and see if you can't make them slow up a little? I think that last crash was my serving table."

"I will. And will you please—"

"Yes, I'll hurry," Donna assured him impatiently. "I'm hurrying now."

Downstairs, a sudden and almost unearthly calm obtained. Mr. Gwynn glanced about quickly. Not a man was in sight, but the upstairs confusion was conspicuously absent. Instincts of artistic home-making were not absolutely lacking even in the Grober band, apparently from the way furniture had been set about living room and dining room, one might almost have thought that the family had moved in to stay. There were half a dozen fairly good rugs on the floors and some one had gone to the extreme length of hanging

the broken mirror from the picture molding over there.

Everything, in fact, suggested that the infernal van was almost empty now and—well, that didn't matter. Mr. Gwynn smiled unpleasantly, as he hurried out in search of Grober the primitive, who little knew what was readying for him upstairs. William then ceased smiling altogether, for the van was in fact empty, and Grober sat again in his sedan, with the engine running!

"Here! Wait!" William said commandingly, as he hurried to its side.

"Keep out o' this!" Grober barked, and it was instantly apparent to William that his temper had not sweetened. "Connors!"

"Yeah?" grunted the hireling with the bad eye.

"If Dick here dunno how to drive a car, you gotta take the van back. Get busy!"

The man started as if struck. Then, poor benighted creature though he was, he steeled himself and faced his employer squarely.

"Not me!" he said.

"Why not you?" Grober roared.

"How could I drive anything with this lame arm?" the man inquired, and moved the arm slightly and winced with a pain obviously just a shade less than unbearable.

"You got no lame arm!" Grober said violently.

"I gotta lame arm! I can't no more than lift it now," the other insisted. "It got crushed when that trunk fell on it in there. For all I know, it's broken. It feels broken."

Mr. Grober considered him with flaming eyes.

"It's cold feet you got, you poor pill!" said he. "I gotta damn good notion t' get out and sock you!"

"Go on an' sock me," Mr. Connors sighed resignedly. "I can't sock you back. I gotta lame arm."

"At that, his arm might be hurt, boss," the man Dick said tolerantly, for he was comfortably settled in the back of the sedan. "The trunk sointly fell on him."

IT seemed to William, who was hopefully aware that all this was taking time, that Mr. Grober gritted his big, coarse, yellow teeth. At all events, his attention whisked to Jimmy.

"Then it's your job," he said briefly. "Run her back, Jim, and stick her in the corner of the old shed. Then come on to Dorkin's as quick as you can. We got twelve loads o' steel t' draw to-day an' we're late as it is."

"Well, sure we are—and that steel's my job," Jimmy replied briskly. "I gotta check that steel over m'self; nobody else knows about that stuff. I can't drive no van back t' the shop."

"You—"

"No, boss, the steel is more important," James said firmly and with great finality and advanced toward the sedan himself. "Leave the van where it is. We can send for it any time."

"Leave it, hell!" Mr. Grober thundered. "D'y'e think I been killin' part of an hour t' take that thing away from this Gwynn guy—and then leave it for him to make more money outer?"

"Well, that of course is absurd," William put in briskly, for he had thought of several things to say and Donna still tarried. "Now let's see, Grober, if we can't—"

"I told you to keep out of it," said the other and fixed his brutal smile again upon Jimmy. "You! Who's runnin' my business, rat? Me or you?"

"Well—you, boss," Jimmy conceded, "but at that—"

"In the back corner o' the old shed and don't waste no time gettin' to Dor-kin's afterward," said Mr. Grober, in conclusion, as he slammed the door and let off the emergency brake; but as an afterthought he turned to William. "All I gotta say to you is this: the responsibility for that van's on your shoulders till she's safe back in my shed! Got that? On your shoulders, kid, and if it don't land in as good condition as when it went out, you pay for it!"

"Well—don't go for a minute!" William cried, in the same commanding way. "Don't think for an instant, Grober, that—"

Even then Grober had backed out to the curb and was backing around. For a moment, William was moved to run after him, still seeking to make his commanding tone function; in the moment, Grober had started forward; now he was rattling swiftly toward the Greenfield Avenue end of the block. Grober, in fine, had motored out of the proposition before Donna had finished powdering her nose.

The man Jimmy shrugged his shoulders and smiled sourly.

"Quite a hard-boiled guy, ain't he?"

"Yes," agreed William sincerely. "He wants you to take the van away from here, does he?"

"You heard him."

"Don't do it!" Gwynn answered bluntly. He was delighted, too, at the manner in which his apparently reviving brain leaped at the newest emergency. "Leave it just as it is, and I'll see that it gets back all right."

James whirled upon him.

"D'ye think I wanta drive that damn thing?" he demanded savagely. "D'ye think I want 'em dressing me up in a wooden kimono? Why, that old truck's jinxed from the tires t' the top!

That van's killed a coupla guys already and put I dunno how many more in the hospital! You don't know about it, but—say, I hope t' telya, I'm scared o' that bus!"

"Then I wouldn't go within a mile of it, far less try to drive it," William said earnestly. "Because, in that frame of mind you see, you're bound to be unduly nervous and probably you'll run down half a dozen people. Just leave it there and go on about your other work and I'll explain to Mr. Grober."

"**Y**EAH, I heard you explainin' something t' Mr. Grober,"

Jimmy said, smiling sadly, and turned reluctantly toward the van. "Well—we all gotta die some time, I guess."

"True, but why hurry it up this way? My dear fellow, just leave it there and—"

"You said that before, mister." Jimmy sighed and climbed to the driver's seat. "I got my job t' think about."

"What? Is your job more important than your life?" William demanded. "Do you think you're justified in risking other people's lives in starting out this way, nervous, trembling?"

"I'd get a lot more nervous tryin' t' tell Grober why I left it here," James smiled, grimly and much too intelligently, as he turned away from William and prodded about in search of the starter. "Oh, I'm wise, mister, an' for my part you could have it and welcome. But—Grober, y' know."

"Even so—"

"Oh, you blank blank—" Jimmy remarked, with deep feeling; but he was addressing the van's engine.

William's jaw muscles tightened as he glanced toward the open side door

of the house. Surely, unless she had collapsed, Donna must be coming now; surely, unless he was more than human, Jimmy must give ear to reason when Donna smiled at him.

"Wait there, just a minute!" William cried.

"There'll be no—waitin' if I ever—get this started!" the other panted. "I know this engine, mister. I know this—"

He said a great deal more and said it loudly and shockingly, the neighborhood considered, but William did not stay to hear. It was not the sort of language he fancied and he was sorely pressed for time. Why, with Grober eliminated as a source of cash, time meant so very much now.

"Oh, there you are!" he cried at Donna, descending the staircase just then.

"Will I do?" the girl inquired and glittered tentatively for him.

"You—yes! Wonderful! Now come on! There's a man out here taking the van away and—"

"But he can't do that! He mustn't do that!"

"He'll do it, fast enough, unless you get out there on the double and vamp him to a pulp!" puffed Mr. Gwynn. "Come on!"

Hastily, Donna gave one last glance into her little mirror and dropped it into her little vanity case. Hastily, she stepped to William's side—and out of doors the engine roared into action and there was a grinding of gears. Mr. Gwynn seized the lady's delicate little paw and dragged her to the door as he shouted:

"Hey, there! Wait! Don't go yet!"

But the van was lumbering backward now and even though William waved both hands and trotted forward, beckoning, James kept on and on. His

teeth were visibly set, his eyes two slits, as he gripped the wheel; only at the curb did he yell at William Gwynn:

"I got her goin'! I got her goin'! G'by!"

There was a final crunch of gears as William came to the side of the vehicle. Then, just as if William had not all but waved his hands free of their arms, the van rolled on and away.

Gentle rain caressed them both as Donna demanded:

"Why in the world didn't you keep him here until I could talk to him, Bill?"

"Why in the world didn't you come and talk to him while he was here?" Mr. Gwynn inquired with some acerbity.

"Are you blaming me because the man came and took his own property? That is what happened, isn't it?"

"Oh, that's what happened," Gwynn said grimly. "And I'm blaming you for—"

"You might have told me in the very first place that something of the kind might occur!" Donna flashed. "I didn't want to be marooned here!"

Some really snappy words trembled upon the very tip of William's tongue. He swallowed them hurriedly and even smiled like a gentleman; but sadly.

"Well, we needn't stand out here in the rain and fight about it, Donna. Let's get inside and see what's to be done next, because I have to do it and—and rush along!" said William, and his voice broke a little at the end.

IN just what direction did he mean to rush now? Grober had been scratched from his list of prospects; the banks were out of it; he knew almost nobody who might—well, he wasn't licked yet, by a long shot, no

matter how black things looked at the moment. He'd make Donna's arrangements for her and then move on.

It was hot and stuffy in there now. He opened a window or two before facing the beautiful young woman with a determined:

"Too bad things worked out like that, of course, but we'll get another van and some men this time and—"

"You can't!"

"I'm pretty sure that I can. I'll see if there's a telephone in the neighborhood."

"You'll just waste your time," Mrs. Worth advised him and, but that there seemed no reason for such a thing, he could have sworn that she was stifling some sort of hysterical mirth. "I tried them all, hours ago. They said it was funny, but the whole town seemed to have picked this off day for moving."

"Did you try the Elite Storage?"

"First of all, of course. They're the biggest."

"Murphy, then?"

"Naturally, Bill. He has three vans and they were all out on emergency call. Some one named—oh, I don't know; Rockwell, I think it was—had to move in a hurry."

By thunder! The mirth *was* there, somewhere or other!

By no means was it twinkling frankly in her eyes, as honest mirth should twinkle. Rather was it dodging and ducking around, like a harried cat seeking cover after a raid on the cream pitcher. Mr. Gwynn, considering this very peculiar phenomenon, drove the spurs hard into his tired brain. The brain merely stood still and shook its head for a while—and then took at least one step forward.

"I say, do you remember Murphy's number?" William asked sharply.

"His telephone number?"

"Yes. Three-one-six, isn't it?"

"Why no, that's your own telephone number, isn't it?" Donna laughed. "Murphy's is one-two-seven, Bill, but calling him again is no use, because he told me—"

"Do you remember the address of the house you rented, yet?"

Donna started a little, but she did face him blankly.

"No, Bill. I don't. Not yet."

And then she started much more violently and backed away, and for this there was reason enough: a very astonishing change had come over William Gwynn. Abruptly, he had turned to a deep, rich red; he was walking down upon her with arms swinging almost in the Grober manner; but worst of all were his eyes, which blazed hot fury, and his ample fists, which were clenched until the knuckles had whitened.

Indeed, glancing at him, the casual observer just then could have drawn but one conclusion: civilization had registered another failure in the case of William Gwynn and he was about to batter down the delicate shrinking little creature.

"Say! There's a joke here somewhere that I'm not sharing!" he cried vehemently. "Just why is it that you can remember everything under the sun except the address of that house?"

"Bill!" Donna gasped up at him. "You're—you're going to hit me!"

"I'm not going to hit you!" William snapped disgustedly, albeit he failed altogether to relax. "Why is it?"

Lips working, the girl gazed up at him. As he observed with a remarkable lack of compunction, she was genuinely and even guiltily scared now. He caused his fairly ferocious glower to turn to a sort of super-glower, which might have caused even Grober to

quail. Mrs. Worth, quite busy in flattening against the wall, relieved herself of a mouselike squeak.

"Bill! Please, Bill!" she faltered. "I'll tell! Don't look at me like that! It's because—why, I suppose it's because there isn't any house, Bill. I mean, I never rented any house at all!"

"You never—"

"No, Bill. I—I just picked up the furniture and everything and—and left home!" Donna confessed; and while William strove to make something of that remark, she gave it much more point by adding, very softly: "With *you!*"

CHAPTER X.

TRAPPED.

FOR Gwynn at least there followed a tiny, astounding interval of utter confusion.

The broken mirror on the wall was laughing at him—a remarkable thing for any mirror to do, broken or otherwise. The apathetic reindeer on the little Labrador rug roused a bit and also laughed at him.

That must be it—too much shock, too much strain, had done their work upon a brain not accustomed to shock or strain and William Gwynn had lost his poor wits! Essentially a lunatic, hearing things that had not been said, seeing things that were not happening, he was here with a girl who—William gripped himself hard at this point and the confusion, rather mercifully, departed. He was here with the girl, fast enough, but wrong about the rest of it; he might be somewhat shaken, but he wasn't crazy!

His ferocity seemed to have ebbed during the interval. Mrs. Worth no longer cowered before him. Hands

behind her back, lips pursed enchantingly, she no longer sought to push her way out through the substantial side-wall of his future home. She was smiling at William with an audacity which, if it lacked great assurance, was even more lacking in reassurance. It was almost as if, in a rather thunder-struck way, Donna was enjoying the weird joke.

"What do you mean by 'leaving home with *me*'?" William exploded.

"Don't shout. Neighbors may be listening. Didn't I?"

"Not in that sense, most certainly!" William raged on; and then he took a nice, new strong hold on himself and even contrived a badly strained smile. "Pardon me, but I'm a little bit keyed up to-day," he said more gently. "This is a joke of some sort, of course, but I'm afraid we'll have to call it off and just talk sense, Donna. I—I have mighty little time to waste. So, where is this new home of yours? And, by the way, will you mind very much if your things are moved in a couple of little open trucks? I may possibly be able to get hold of two."

Donna shook her head.

"There really isn't any house, Bill."

"Well, were you—er—lying when you said there was?"

"Y-yes."

"And were you also lying when you told about losing your memory in thunderstorms and so on?"

Donna's smile grew almost pitying.

"Bill, why in the world should anybody forget things just because it thunders?"

"I'm sure I don't know, but you said you did," William replied, and his voice rose again, and again his eye kindled. "Have you been lying about everything else, Donna? Weren't you even going to move until you saw

me come along with a van or—or—say, what is all this, anyway?"

Mrs. Worth seemed almost offended.

"Of course I was moving!"

"All right! When a person moves, he moves somewhere and—"

"Well, I was moving somewhere, Bill. I was moving out!"

For a moment William blinked.

"Just in a general way, do you mean? Just moving nowhere in particular?"

"Just moving out," said Mrs. Worth, and the satisfaction in her tone increased. "I said I would and I did."

"Why?" Gwynn inquired faintly.

"Because we had the fight, Bill."

"With your landlord?"

"Heavens, no! Our landlord's a perfect dear, Bill. He's an old business friend of dad's and he insisted upon giving us a whole year's rent as a wedding present. No, I meant the fight with Freddie."

"That's your husband?"

"He was!" Donna answered viciously. "I've left him now."

SEVERAL times since driving away from his happy boarding-house that morning, William had known fairly hair-raising moments. But this kind of adventure, this getting between husband and wife and mixing into their private squabbles—why, years ago, a grandfather of William's had been shot through the heart because, with the aid of a hickory club, he had persuaded a certain pork butcher, later hanged, to cease beating his wife!

Of course, the window was wide open and William had but to dive through it and run like mad. He took a step toward the window and paused again.

All these belongings of Donna Worth's were strewn about June's be-

loved house here. Heart and head together might yearn for flight, but they'd have to hang around until the furniture had been transferred to some other setting.

"Look here, Donna!" William said firmly. "I never—"

"Oh, I'll have to tell you all about it now, Bill," the girl sighed. "I never expected to be let in for anything like this, either, you know. Will you just stop fussing and shouting and walking around like that? I was perfectly justified in getting out. We had a simply terrible fight!"

"I don't want to hear about it!"

"But I can't explain without telling you, can I? You see, it started last night and Freddie—well, he said a lot of nasty things and I may have said one or two myself. But I came down this morning all ready to forgive and forget and he just started the row all over again. He said more things and—and worse things, Bill!"

For the time being, William was withholding comment. Presently he would cut loose, perchance convincing Mrs. Worth that her husband was not the only man in Downford who could say unpleasant things. His lips tightened; he folded his arms and waited.

And Donna laid a little hand on one of them and looked up at him, and one second later William unfolded his arms and patted her round shoulder.

"Well, well, probably he never meant any of them," he said heartily. Her lips were trembling and she looked as if she were going to cry again. Poor little thing!

"Oh, yes, he did!" Donna assured him gustily. "He meant them all and I threatened to take everything that belonged to me and clear out. That was just talk, of course; but then he said that I wanted to go away with—with

some other man, Bill, and that was too horrible. I couldn't stay after that!"

"The damned rotter!" said William.

"Why, Freddie's not—well—yes, he is, isn't he?" Mrs. Worth sniffed. "Anyhow, he went to his office at last and I got things together as fast as I could. I thought I'd find a van and have them sent over to the big storage place in Pottsville and then I'd go home to dad and—and when Freddie came back to-night he'd—"

"There, there, there!" William crooned, as emotion overcame her for a little.

Donna gulped twice and smiled radiantly.

"And then you came along!" she cried. "And that was just too perfect, just too incredibly wonderful! Don't you see? The neighbors were all watching and, naturally, he'd go to them first when he found the house empty and they'd tell him and describe you—and he'd get a lesson that would last for the rest of his life. And he will, too!"

"Because they — er — described me?" William inquired.

Donna hesitated.

"I thought—first, you know—that maybe I wouldn't tell you at all. But it doesn't matter. You were the whole cause of the fight in our family, Bill!"

"I?" gasped William. "Why, I—"

"Because you danced with me so many times at that fool party last night. Freddie's horribly jealous and—well, looking at you doesn't hurt the eyes a bit, Bill."

WILLIAM'S own eyes, for an instant, grew distinctly rounder and his spine distinctly colder. Somehow he found himself wishing that he had failed to attend

that party. It had been no less than a load of dynamite, badly packed on a rickety wagon, jogging along a road full of unexpected bumps and likely at any second to hurl utter destruction in every direction!

Now the lady was glowing again, peculiarly, timidly.

"Bill!"

"Er—about that nonsense—"

"Was it all nonsense? That's what I really want to know," said Donna. "Freddie swore that you were in love with me. You're not, are you? Not really?"

"Not yet," confessed William; but even as he said it, his biting sarcasm turned to a sigh that might have meant anything.

"Because that would be simply awful! Some one said that you were engaged."

"Er—yes, I am, of course," Gwynn replied hastily. "And now let's see what we're going to do about—"

"And Freddie swore that I was in love with you, too, Bill!" Donna pursued.

"But you're not!" William laughed, and was briefly impressed by the hollow effect with which some houses can echo a laugh.

"N-no, Bill," sighed the girl, causing him to shudder; for she didn't seem any too sure about it. "But he said that! Freddie said that!"

Words failed her. Tears came. Donna, the most absurd little handkerchief pressed to her eyes, wept freely. And she was very near to William Gwynn, and she was of the tender type that demands much comforting. Perhaps, in drifting even nearer to William, Donna was making no plea for consolation; perhaps, had one asked him the direct question, William would have replied indignantly that

the last thing in his mind was to soothe the grief-stricken little creature by any means at all, save by such poor words as he might be able to muster.

Yet, these things notwithstanding, the curious fact remains that as she swayed against him a certain, and probably noble, protective instinct surged up in William's bosom, bidding him offer the broken flower tangible evidence that there was at least one to shield her from the cruel world. Just as any big brother might have done at such a time, William put his arms about the girl.

Donna sighed vastly and gave him a little start by cuddling closer as she buried the cream and roses that made up her countenance just beside the top-most button of his vest.

It was queer, indeed, but now, when he should have been most disturbed, his brain seemed to be clearing up. Inspiration, in fact, had paused and touched his brain with magic wand, and William Gwynn smiled suddenly, brightly. Here, you see, was genuine remorse, a tool which in skilled hands may be made to do almost anything. Bitterly indeed was this poor young one regretting the hectic impulse that had caused her to dismantle her little home. Now, from the bottom of her distracted little heart, she was indubitably wishing that the impulse never had taken shape. What could have been simpler, all around?

"Don't cry like that," William said evenly. "I'll tell you just what we'll do, and everything will be all right."

"What—Bill?" Donna sobbed.

"I'll go next door; they must have a telephone. I'll see if I can't get in touch with Lowry and have him send the two little trucks I mentioned a while ago. If he can, he'll probably be able to find a couple of men for us as

well, and we'll just put everything aboard, Donna, and rush it back to your own little house. And when Fred comes home, he'll never be any the wiser!" William even added a gay, "Ha, ha, ha!"

Mrs. Worth drew back her head and gazed up at him wonderingly.

"Do you think I'd ever go back to him, after that?"

"Why—er—yes! He's sorry by this time and—"

"And do you think I'd ever go back *there*, where we were so happy?"

"You'll be just as happy there again," William assured her. "So I'll go and see—"

"No!" Donna cried passionately, and went even farther with: "No! No! No!"

AGAIN the cream and roses were buried; again Mrs. Worth wept, and the curly golden head shook violently, claiming all of William's attention for several seconds; he had never seen hair just like that before, so purely yellow, so silky-fine.

He sighed; the inspiration seemed to have landed nowhere at all. He also frowned, for it was dawning upon William that this was really not the thing for June Stannard's fiancé to be doing. But he stood quite still, patting the golden head, for can one decently thrust away a lady who weeps so trustfully on one's bosom?

Presently she'd be through weeping, he assumed. By that time he might have another brilliant thought. William sighed again, and, since no immediate change in the situation seemed to impend, patted on—and started! That sound was the distant town clock striking one.

Aye, one o'clock, and he was standing here—to put it brutally, hugging

another man's wife; with exactly six dollars still the extent of his cash capital! His arms tightened in a convulsive little twitch, which may have been misunderstood by Donna, for she breathed a protesting little "Bill!" although she failed to struggle very energetically to disengage herself.

Gwynn had all but forgotten her.

Where was he to raise his money now? It would be raised—absolutely! On the point itself he was still entirely firm; but all his firmness could not put seven o'clock more than six hours in the future, and not even a start had been made.

Maybe if he tried— Wait! Had he not glided off the track once more, in worrying about money at just this time?

Wasn't it of infinitely greater importance to get girl and furniture together out of June's house, before some of June's friends chanced along and looked in? To any ordinary person, William could have explained the whole affair; but not to June, this day, and feeling as she did about Donna Worth.

Mr. Gwynn's chest took to heaving in a fashion that gave a peculiar up and down motion to Donna's pretty head. She glanced up inquiringly.

"Donna," William said desperately, "what do you want to do, then?"

"I'm going back to New York, to dad."

"No, I meant about the furniture."

"We'll leave it here for a few days, of course."

"We'll do *what*?" gasped Mr. Gwynn.

"Well, is there anything amazing about that?" Donna asked impatiently. "You're the agent for the property, aren't you?"

"Er—yes, but—"

"Then you can arrange it with the owners, of course. You can tell them what happened, and they'll understand."

"Not these people, Donna. These are—are very peculiar people, and they are very fussy about this house. In fact, they're the most eccentric people in some ways that I ever did business with. They'd be wild if they knew we'd moved in like this."

"I don't believe it. I'm not trying to steal their old house, you know. And if they are, I'll pay them whatever they ask, and father will send some one up at the end of the week and have the things taken over to Pottsville and—and that will be the end of all my happiness!" Donna stated, and broke down again.

"Not a bit of it!" said Mr. Gwynn, and rather harshly, for these tears were now running off the softer side of him as water runs from a duck's back. "I'm sorry the owners are what they are, but I know mighty well they would never stand for this stunt without skinning me alive. You see—Say, what day is this?"

"The—the end of the world," said Donna.

"No, it's the tenth," William corrected. "*Was* it the tenth? Yes, it was. Gosh, I'm glad I remembered that just when I did! The owners are going to move some things in this very afternoon!"

"They can't. There's no van," Donna moaned indifferently.

"This," explained Gwynn plausibly, for when circumstances demanded such a thing he too could turn a few mendacious handsprings, "is new furniture coming up from New York on trucks from the factory. So we'll have to empty this place just about as fast as ever a house was emptied! You stay

here like a good little girl, and I'll see if I can get in touch with Lowry."

EVER so gently he would have disengaged himself, but Donna clung to him and gazed upward with wet, reproachful eyes. "That's all you ever think about, isn't it—business?"

"But in this case—"

"And whether people will think you are a good real-estate agent! It doesn't mean a single thing to you that my heart is—is broken!"

Once more William's vest absorbed moisture. Once more William sighed heavily. He could shake her off and let her cry it out as she pleased, although that would have been a rather heartless trick. No, the job that confronted him now was the very thing he had shrunk from doing: he'd have to tell Mrs. Worth the truth about this house and about June, and how June felt.

And how he hated to do it! Except to mention to Ambrose, once in a while, how impossibly lovely she was, Gwynn detested the very idea of discussing June with anybody on earth, and particularly with any woman; and he had a funny, creepy distaste toward discussing her with this lady who insisted upon remaining in his arms—funny and senseless, but it was there all the same.

Soundlessly Mr. Gwynn snorted disgust at himself; already he had wasted valuable minutes. He braced himself for a quick, convincing recital of the facts, and as he did so he noted that the eyes were on him once more, their mere reproach turned to hot accusation.

"You're too mean and selfish to care about it, one way or the other! And it's your fault that we're here at all—every bit yours!"

"But—"

"It is! If you hadn't wanted that third dance, this wouldn't have happened. It was the third one that set Freddie wild. He said anybody might dance one dance or two dances, but when you insisted on the third in succession and looked at me as you did—Oh, I hope you suffer, too, somehow! I wish I could make you suffer!"

"You're doing it," escaped Gwynn.

"No, I mean *really* suffer!" cried Donna Worth; and there was that in her tone which caused William's heart to skip a beat. "I'd like to make you suffer so horribly that—that—"

Again she wept upon the bosom she yearned to lacerate. Again William sighed and utter bewilderment crept into his already baffled eyes. Some definitely hideous thing had overtaken the whole scheme of his existence this day; he couldn't formulate even one lone pathetic little plan before it blew up in his face!

Even in his brain, which fumbled about for small doubts as a starving dog scratches for crusts, he could not find the smallest doubt that Donna meant what she said. Given the chance, she'd make him suffer and—well, then, he couldn't tell her the truth after all, could he? And if it wasn't to be the truth, what was it to be?

William had his indomitable moments. This was one of them. There was a way out, simply because there must be a way out. In any situation, however distracting, there must be some little bright spot for which one can give thanks and upon which one can build. William smiled faintly: there was one here at least, little as it counted. All the sobbing and patting was being done indoors and out of sight and not on the seat of a moving van!

Even so, it might be well to move a bit farther from the windows, for people did live on either side. To the south resided the Brinker family, but they were off on a world tour. To the north lived—what the dickens was the name of the old couple, anyhow? Oh, Sanderson—Lemuel Sanderson. They were well along in years and unlikely to see much that happened in the neighborhood, but the wary man takes no chances, even with the eyes of the aged.

William glanced toward the window—and immediately thereafter all of William's actions became involuntary and automatic. He cried aloud, making a queer, soft, gurgling sound. He jerked himself free from Donna, pushing her away as if she had been infected with a plague. He staggered backward, gaping in the most preposterous way.

For, with his arms folded along the sill of the open window and his head resting upon them somewhat after the manner of one of the well-known cherubs, a boy of ten or eleven grinned happy appreciation at William Gwynn. He had been there—how long?

He himself gave some slight indication of the time. He winked knowingly at William and cried loudly, for all the world to hear:

"I saw you! I saw you huggin' her! I saw you kissin' her!"

CHAPTER XI.

BRIBERY AND WORSE.

DONNA screamed faintly. Any girl might have screamed just then, for with conditions what they were, this was hardly the type of boy one would have selected for a window decoration.

Had he possessed an angel smile and softly curling locks, an Eton collar and well-manicured nails, he would have been far less terrible. With such a child one has at least a sporting chance; one may even lie to him with a certain shamelessness and a comfortable sense of security.

But this boy's light blue eyes were sharp as needle-points; he displayed freckles of a deep color and incredible size; he had a snub nose, and his hands were frankly dirty, while just above the flannel shirt, buttonless at the sunburned neck, was a leer of which an adult criminal might well have been heartily ashamed.

To William's fevered mind he was an imp, hot from Hades! And still, he was there and to be dealt with. At present, hands resting on the sill, he was looking them over critically as he added, almost chanting: "Oh, what I know about you!"

"Er—hello, son!" William shouted strangely.

The boy stood back, grinning and alert. Mr. Gwynn swallowed his next irresponsible yell quite suddenly, and, although it tore his throat, laughed a great big hearty laugh.

"Hold on. Don't run away," he said. "I want to talk to you."

"What for?"

"To—to get acquainted, of course. You live around here somewhere, don't you?"

"I live next door."

"Right next door, eh?" Mr. Gwynn even managed to smile ingratiatingly and perched on the sill. "What's your name, kid?"

"Harold."

"Harold Sanderson?"

"Harold Mapes. Sanderson's my grammar 'n' grampa. We come to live with them."

William nodded easily, even charmingly. His rapid-thinking machinery whirled busily, but as yet it had failed to produce anything of a glowingly satisfactory nature.

"I see. Come over here, won't you?"

"I'm all right where I am," the lad said pleasantly, for one of the milestones of his little life had been set up, not two months back, with the robust slap he had received as a reward for discovering a certain other embracing couple.

"There's something I want to say to you that can't be shouted," Mr. Gwynn explained. "Er—can you keep a secret?"

"The one about kissin' and huggin' her?"

"I tell you, I wasn't—" William began violently and modulated it to a purring: "Well, in a way, yes. About our being here at all, I mean?"

The boy seemed puzzled.

"How can you keep that a secret, when all the neighbors was watching you move in?" he asked reasonably enough.

"The furniture—yes, of course, but I didn't mean the furniture. I meant, er, ourselves. You see, we came in unexpectedly, and nobody knows we're here and we don't want them to know yet, because—"

"You jumped a lease somewhere, huh?"

"No, we didn't do anything like that!" William plowed on. "But pretty soon, when we're all settled down, we're going to give a—a sort of surprise house-warming to our friends, and that'll be the very first thing they know of our being here at all. So, you see, if you went and told your folks that you saw us, they might tell somebody we knew and the whole

surprise would be spoiled. You wouldn't want to do that?"

THE boy seemed still more puzzled. "Is this—right, mister?" he asked.

"Well, do you suppose I'd lie?" William cried. "That's not a very nice thing to suggest to an older person, Harold." And, having waited some seconds for this to take effect, he added: "So you'll say nothing at all about seeing us, eh?"

Harold smiled skeptically, unimpressed.

"My mother says the things people don't talk about are always things they're ashamed to have people hear about," he mused.

"That's quite true in many cases, but not here, I assure you, my boy, and—Harold."

"What?"

"Come here," William said softly, and dropped one hand into his trousers pocket.

Three seconds later, he had ridden triumphantly through another struggle. There was a crisp, new five dollar bill in that pocket and a poor, ragged old one dollar bill. Upon the latter William's fingers closed, and he sighed and hesitated. These days, if what he had heard of the golden past was accurate, a lone dollar was not so likely as of yore to buy the deathless loyalty of a sophisticated child. But five dollars! William sighed again. Well, it was worth five dollars.

"Harold, we're both business men, I guess," he said softly. "If I want to keep my surprise, I'll have to pay for it, eh? You take this and just forget you ever saw anybody around this house."

He clinched the matter with another of his big, hearty laughs. Little Harold

Mapes stood petrified and breathless. He gazed at the bill, neatly folded in his palm; he gazed at William Gwynn.

"Well—"

"It's all right. It's just a matter of business."

"Well—" said Harold's voice again, and it was smaller and weaker this time as he glanced over his shoulder toward his home.

"Oh, put it in your pocket, kid, and forget it," said William, in his merry way.

"Har-old!" called a cold, crystal clear voice from the general direction of the house next door.

"That's my mother!" Harold said huskily, but he mastered his feelings and thrust the bill into his own pocket, and then sauntered away with a nonchalance that was balm to William's soul.

Expensive—yes, but the boy was fixed! If William knew anything of boys, little Harold would retire to his room now and dream of the things five dollars will buy. He turned a rather wan smile upon Donna; he discovered that Donna herself was finding nothing to smile about.

"That was a bright thing to do," she commented.

"Well, if you thought of anything brighter, why didn't you do it?" William asked, forcefully. "Did you want that young one to gallop home and tell his people that he saw—?"

"You with your arms around me?" Donna supplied. "No, but he will, just the same."

"Why?"

"Because he's a nasty, treacherous-looking little brat," said Mrs. Worth, who was growing downright morbid, "and even if he wasn't, you've made him so. He might never have thought twice about it, if you hadn't shown him

that it was important by giving him that money."

"I doubt—"

"You needn't. I'm right," said the girl. "That's always a terrible mistake—letting people think something's queer and wrong, when it might never occur to them otherwise."

She sighed. She shuddered visibly.

"Well, it's done now," William shrugged. "We've plenty of other things to worry about. Where were we, anyway? Donna, why under the sun did you lie about that house in the first place? Why didn't you simply say you wanted to go to Pottsville? I'd have kept on, rain or no rain."

"No, you wouldn't. You wouldn't ever have started. You were in a hurry and I knew, if I said that, you'd have refused even to have the things loaded. And I was mad all through then, Bill, and I just wanted to get away and—brrr!"

Such firmness as had been jelling within William melted into sudden concern. Why, the poor kid was shaking violently now; her very lips were turning blue!

"WELL, well! Don't be so scared about it," William began.

"I'm not scared. I'm cold!"

"Yes, you're pretty wet and—"

"I'm soaked through! I'm simply frozen stiff, Bill. I've been getting colder and colder ever since we came in here."

She ended with a new shiver. In William's bosom the noble protective instinct awoke with a bound. More time was going—yes; but the poor child couldn't very well be surrendered to flu just to save ten minutes.

"How can we—er—warm you?" he demanded.

"Well, usually, when I'm wet, I put

on some dry clothes," Donna chattered. "I'll have to go upstairs and do that now. Where's my suitcase? Oh, here."

"And while you're doing it, I'll go—"

"Please don't go anywhere till I come down. And, Bill!"

"Yes?"

"I haven't any other stockings. Is the gas turned on here?"

"It should be."

"Then will you dry these for me? And see if you can't dry my shoes a little, too?" Donna asked, and smiled down upon him from the landing where he had been wont to picture June. "You can just light the oven and put up a piece of string?"

"I—yes," said William, drearily. "Yes."

An odd thing and he himself fully realized its oddness, but there was a hint of shock in the very thought. Another man of his years might have said carelessly "Sure! Get 'em off!" or something of the kind; but William, despite his too lively appreciation of feminine charm, actually glanced in the other direction as Donna dropped the suitcase and swiftly stripped sheer stockings from slender legs.

Now she was thudding around softly upstairs and William, in the blue and white kitchen, found himself pondering rather actively.

He was here, surely enough, with the oven going and a pair of filmy stockings strung on a line before the open door and a pair of tiny shoes standing inside on a bit of the thick paper with which all the new floors were covered—but why the devil was he here at all?

Why wasn't he hustling madly about town after money? Didn't he understand that he was to be married

in much less than six hours and that, long before that time, he had two thousand dollars to raise?

To be sure, he could run now, if he chose, and leave Donna up there, chancing it that the bizarre affair would not come to June's ear before they left town, chancing his own ability to explain when they returned. A minute or more he walked the floor, revolving this possible course of action, which surely had its attractive features.

But it had others less attractive. Donna seemed to blame him, just as June had seemed to blame him; and, somewhere behind all that loveliness of Donna's, he suspected shrewdly that a quantity of real spite was lurking.

She had even stated specifically that she yearned to injure him and while that, at the time of utterance, might have been a mere emotional bubble, the proportions to which the idea might be amplified, once the lady found herself deserted here, was enough to give pause to a hardier man than William. He ceased his walking and shook his head.

"Oh, Bill!" floated down, from the head of the stairs.

"Yes?" William answered patiently, as he trudged out. "Yes?"

"Bill, it's shocking, but you'll have to dry my dress for me, too, and my—well, just the dress. It's a pulp."

"Roll it up and dry it later," William snapped. "You have other clothes with you. We can't take time for that."

"We'll have to take time for it, unless you want me to go around looking like something in a Follies chorus," Donna explained calmly. "I haven't another thing to put on, Bill. I was so furious when I packed that case that I didn't know what I was doing.

There's nothing in it but a picture of Freddie and his old bathrobe."

William gritted his teeth and prepared to voice an opinion or two.

"Here, Bill," said the musical voice above. "Catch!"

IT dropped wetly into his hands, the rather heavy little silk frock. He shook it out and hurried back to the kitchen, snarling. Now what? More cord, of course. He found another piece and strung it up, throwing the frock across it so that it fluttered in the heat from the oven.

Nor was he at all nice about performing this simple service for a charming girl; the sounds that came from him now suggested nothing but the lion cage before feeding time. Donna's furniture had affronted the hallowed house; this shameful exhibition was no less than defiling.

But at least it wouldn't be there for long.

William's finer fury subsided. Ten minutes hence, when those damned rags were dry, he'd hurl them up to her and bid her get into them, descend quickly and hear the law laid down in earnest! Another two minutes and she'd understand perfectly that, whatever her own imbecile idea of leaving the stuff here, they'd have to get out, bag and baggage. And just about the time she began wailing again—eh?

William emerged abruptly from his happy meditation and listened.

Some one at the side door, which, by the way, was not locked! Almost beyond doubt, it was a tradesman of the neighborhood, come to call as tradesmen have a way of doing upon the newly arrived family. And he'd brought his nerve with him, too! Without so much as one knock, he had shuffled straight into the house.

Gwynn smiled horribly as he hurried from the kitchen. Here, at least, was one moment that he could enjoy, for he was filled to the very ears with great, hot, powerful, pungent words that seethed and tried to claw their way to freedom.

"Hey, you!" William cried, coarsely. "What the hell do you mean by coming in here?"

"Why, my sakes!" gasped a flat, fat elderly female voice. "Why—why—"

She stood stock-still. So, for that matter, did William Gwynn, his wicked tongue paralyzed, the flame in his eye flickering down to mere smoldering amazement, as he stared blank and startled inquiry.

For here was a white-haired lady of seventy or thereabout, barrel-like in architecture, comfortably stupid of expression, rather puffy as to cheeks, rather absurdly amiable as to smile. She wore thick-lensed spectacles, above and below and around which she squinted incessantly. Her house gown was a simple cotton print. She was the perfect example of the dear old soul type, but she brought no joy at all to William Gwynn, for William knew well enough who she was. In her neighborly way, Mrs. Sanderson, next door, had just run in for a minute.

"I—I beg your pardon," Gwynn stammered. "I thought—"

"You gave me such a turn!" the lady beamed, and peered straight over her lenses.

"You *are* Will Gwynn!" she announced.

"I—yes."

"Well, Will, I'm just awful glad to see you all moved in and to be the first to welcome you!" the good soul cried, and thrust out her hand.

William took it and drew breath.

"Thanks, of course," he said. "But it just happens that—"

"I dunno's I've ever met you face to face before, Will; of course I've seen you going in and out of here once or twice lately. But I did know your pa at one time and I've met your wild cousin, Peter Spofford, when—well, the less said of him the better, of course. Now, Will?"

"Yes?" William said limply.

"Where's the bride?"

"Whose bride?"

"Well, yours!" the lady laughed delightedly.

"I have no—"

"Laws! I suppose you're just tickled to death with yourselves, both of you!" Mrs. Sanderson hurried along. "Hal—that's my grandson, the little boy that was over here a spell back; I guess most likely you didn't see him, but he saw you!—Harold said he saw you in here, everything topsy turvy and neither of you knowing whether it was or not, you were so busy billing and cooing!"

"**M**ADAM, I assure you that I have never even billed—" William began sternly.

"Dear, dear, dear!" sighed his visitor, and blinked through her spectacles at something far beyond William. "You've no idea how it brings back things, Will. I was a bride myself, once upon a time. I know all about it. Dear me! Why, I remember the day we moved into our first little house in Downford—you know, we came over from Vermont originally, or I did; my husband's people are all Bostonians—and it wasn't any such place as this, I can tell you. Well, you're not much interested in that, are you?"

"I—yes, of course I am," William said politely, "but—"

"Is she just as nice as everybody says, Will?" the caller beamed.

"If you mean—"

"Now, I don't suppose, if I was to meet her on the street, I'd even know June Stannard—or June Gwynn she is now, isn't she?—I dunno's I've seen her since she was a little bit of a girl, before her ma died. No, I know I haven't, come to think of it. There was one time, fifteen, maybe it was twenty years ago when . . ."

William folded his arms and merely waited while she told of the one time she had seen June Stannard.

Perhaps she was slightly deaf? Perhaps she was one of those dear people one so frequently wishes to slay, whose natural limitations keep them strictly to their own thoughts, without regard to all the great world beyond?

Well, be those things as they might be, presently William meant to seize her gently by the throat and hold her fast while he advised her of the true state of affairs and—well, no, he couldn't do that either, after little Harold's report.

"That's very interesting," he said. "And now if you—"

She had turned without warning and thudded softly into the living room. She was looking about with a frown.

"Is she so awful crazy about these old antique things, Will?"

"She—"

"I know lots of folks are, but I dunno's I am. Maybe I'm too old-fashioned myself, but—oh, I don't know. Some of these antiques my daughter buys—that's Mrs. Mapes, Will; she and her husband and the boy are with us now and I must say it makes the house a sight less lonely—some of the things she buys, I wouldn't give house room. Now, she got an

old desk last year, something like that one. Well, not quite the same thing, either. The legs were different. That is, it seems to me as if they were. I don't know, though."

She had paused! William Gwynn laid a gentle hand upon her arm.

"Mrs. Sanderson," he said quickly. "There's a little misunderstanding here. These things are all my—my sister's."

"Your sister's?" cried the lady, blankly.

"That's right. My sister's. You see, she was moving and the rain came on and—"

"Well, upon my soul!" Mrs. Sanderson said breathlessly. "If my Lem ain't pretty near right after all! You starting up housekeeping with a lot of your sister's furniture, and Henry Stannard mighty near the richest man in town. Well, I want to know!"

"That isn't just the idea, either." Mr. Gwynn smiled, however strainedly. "You see, my sister is upstairs now and—"

"Well, he could well have afforded to start you children off with new things, I should say! Lem says he's the meanest man in the State, and after this I believe it. Him with just that one daughter and letting her begin her married life on somebody else's things!"

"You don't understand even yet," Gwynn persisted. "My sister—"

The lady blinked directly at him. Clearly, a new thought was trundling its laborious way to the forefront of her brain.

"You haven't any sister!" she said.

"Er—what? Of course I have. My sister Irene. She's the one whose furniture—"

"There was the one boy. That was you," Mrs. Sanderson informed him

quite accurately, after a hurried glance at the past. "Seems as if you had a brother that died two or three years before you were born, but you never had a sister."

SHE nodded emphatically. William snatched out his handkerchief and dabbed his moist forehead.

"This," he said, loudly and distinctly, "is an adopted sister, Mrs. Sanderson. Irene—my adopted sister. They adopted her when she was a little baby, so of course she's just like a regulation sister. She is upstairs now. She came here with me and her furniture. In fact, her furniture is the reason—"

The direct stare had come to an end. Once more, the lady blinked at him in her hazy, comfortable way.

"I never heard a word about it, Will, and I've lived here nearly all my life and thought I knew everybody in town," she sighed. "I suppose it's nice of her to let you have her furniture, but—where's the blushing bride, Will? Where's she hiding herself?"

Mr. Gwynn relaxed for a moment. A breath or two and he would return to the attack and by the time he had finished Mrs. Sanderson would know that there was, in sooth, no blushing bride at all.

Meanwhile, there was cause for gratitude. Donna, hearing, had understood. Donna would keep out of sight until he had fully developed the situation; perhaps she'd keep out of sight altogether, which — considering the probable state of her toilette at about this time—was just so much the better. Really, his whole task now was just to nail down the latest lie and then ease the gentle old soul out of the house again and—why the deuce was she blinking toward the stairs in that attentive way?

Mistily aware that a door had clicked audibly, up above, some five or ten seconds ago, William also looked toward the stairs. He frowned a little, too. It was well enough that Donna, having grasped things, should play up to them, but she did seem to be overdoing the highly informal sisterly atmosphere a bit. She was standing there now, halfway between landing and upper floor, barelegged, barenecked, wrapped in a man's old bathrobe.

She seemed curiously startled, too. An instant, as her eyes met Gwynn's, he sensed that she was about to turn and flee. Then she stood her ground and smiled dazzlingly as Mrs. Sanderson cried in triumph:

"Well! There's the bride!"

William smiled slightly, unperturbed. Now he'd explain, carefully, carefully, so that Donna caught each word, about his sister here and—*what?* With the gayest, the most musical of her whole collection of laughs, Donna was crying:

"Yes, indeed! Here I am!"

Aye, and now her bare feet were pat-

tering down the stairs and bringing her directly to his side. Now she was standing close to him, slipping an arm through his own and squeezing hard, while she smiled adoration up at him.

"N-no!" William choked out. "She—"

"He's been sort of secret about you, dearie," Mrs. Sanderson was remarking. "He hasn't told me a thing about how or where you were married or anything."

Donna readily snatched at her cue.

"Oh, but we can tell everybody everything now, Billy dearest," she said. "We don't have to keep anything secret any longer! You see, I made Will promise when we—er—eloped, that he'd never tell a soul till I said he could and—why, I'd forgotten all about it." And she glowed at Mrs. Sanderson and added: "But now I just want to tell everybody that we're the happiest people in the whole world!"

A grunting sigh left the caller. "I bet you are!" she chuckled. "Dearie, you come right here and kiss me!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



The Desert of Maine

AFTER visiting the big woods and the unnumbered beautiful lakes in verdant Maine, one hardly expects to see a desert that is as real and barren, so far as it goes, as the plains of Arabia or the wilds of Sahara.

The Desert of Maine is located in the western part of Freeport, the home town of Commander MacMillan, and is about two miles off the Atlantic Highway. Buried under this desert is the once fertile farm of the Tuttle family. Fifty years ago only a small patch of fine sand had broken through the turf, and brush was placed around it by the owner in a vain attempt to check the gradual outpouring. To-day acres upon acres of rippling fine yellow sand stretch away triumphantly in the sunlight, restless as the ocean when the wind blows a gentle breeze across its surface.

What causes it? It may be the bed of a prehistoric lake, since dried up. Some believe it to be a result of the glacial period. At all events it is unique and Maine is proud of its desert which is not duplicated elsewhere in New England.

F. S. Saunders.



For a dumb-bell, Cabbagehead was quite a ball player.

The Crowd Pleaser

When better boners are made, Cabbagehead will make them, said his big league teammates—and that lanky rookie aimed to please

By JAMES L. HILL

A PROPHET is without honor in his own bailiwick." The guy who made that crack never heard about Cabbagehead Carson. Cabbagehead was the dumbest ball player who ever laced on a pair of spikes, but as a "crowd pleaser" he gave Babe Ruth a run for the money.

There was a difference, however, in what the fans expected. They dug down in their jeans to see the Babe give the apple a ride, but they filled the stands to see what "classic" Cabbagehead would pull next, and to

razz him for it. His very nickname was a tribute—an admission that when bigger and better boners were pulled he would pull them.

We didn't have much of a line on him when he joined the club. That he had been a curly wolf in the Grapevine League meant nothing to us. But he wasn't an ordinary rookie. We regulars hadn't been in camp an hour before we heard all about him. From the neck down he was perfect—a natural hitter, covered the outfield like a carpet, and was a streak on the

paths; but from the neck up there were apartments for rent—and they'd been vacant a long time.

The very first day Spider Webb had him running all over the lot looking for the key to the pitcher's box. And that night we pulled a stunt on him so old that I didn't believe there was one guy left in the world who would fall for it—the old snipe hunt.

The idea is simple. You take your sucker out into the woods. Give him a sack and a candle. He's to keep the candle lighted and to hold the mouth of the sack open so you can drive the snipes into it. The main point is to explain to your boob that when awakened the snipe gets confused and rushes to the nearest light.

We rented a taxi and drove out twenty miles to a swamp. Got him planted at the far edge of the swamp, saw that his candle was burning nicely, and then went away "to round up the game."

About midnight he decided maybe it was a bad time of year for snipes and started out to find the gang, and got lost in mud clear up to his neck. A searching party located him about noon the next day.

Everybody expected the skipper would send him home. But that afternoon he rode one of Spider Webb's fast ones into the next county, stole second and third off of "Red Dog" Dawson, who has the best arm in the league, and made three circus catches that made the skipper swallow his eating tobacco. For a dumb-bell, Cabbagehead was considerable ball player.

ON our way north he continued to make a boob out of himself.

Drank out of the finger bowl in the diner; tried to mail a letter in a fire alarm box at St. Louis—we got

him out of jail next morning; and spent hours looking for the Statue of Liberty along the lake front of Chicago.

But when a bird is busting the fences with tremendous drives, stealing everything but the catcher's shoes, and catching every ball within three city blocks of him, the skipper don't care whether he's real bright or not.

"Dumb?" stated the skipper. "Sure he is. But jumpin' junefish, how he can hit 'em! Wish some of you wise birds what ain't hittin' your weight in prune jelly was dumb like he is."

We opened at home against Cincinnati and the score was still nothing to nothing when Cabbagehead came to bat for the first time. He let a couple go by, then up came one low and outside. He shortened his bat, leaned across the pan, and startled the multitude by bunting down the first-base line.

It caught the Red infield flat-footed. The pitcher made a dive for the apple and the first baseman came lumbering over head down. They collided and the ball rolled past them. Then the roar from the stands died out all at once, as if a muffler had been put on it. The infielders forgot the ball, and stood staring in open-mouthed amazement. Cabbagehead had run to third.

"Jumpin' junefish!" yelled the skipper, pushing his way through the mob around the sack, "you feeble-brained ape, what are you tryin' to pull?"

Cabbagehead's reply will live forever.

"Pull something?" he stammered, "It was runner's choice, wasn't it?"

"Runner's choice?"

"Sure. Spider Webb told me how you play it here in the big-league. If there ain't nobody on base a hitter can run to either third or first, whichever

he wants to. If he goes to third, he has to run to second next, and around that way. First is third and third is first until the bases are empty again. Spider says you do it to keep the players on their toes and to make the game more exciting for the fans."

There followed a puzzled silence that lasted maybe a couple of seconds, but seemed longer—and then a whoop went up from all hands. We threw our caps in the air and hugged one another and laid down on the grass and rolled every which way.

The fans couldn't understand what it was all about. Thought we had gone crazy. Finally somebody staggered over to a box and spilled the story. From there it travelled from row to row, creating a riot as it went. I never saw people laugh so hard. They had to beat one another on the back to keep from choking.

It was ten minutes before the game was resumed, and Cabbagehead walked to center field amid a storm of derision that would have broken the heart of a lion. Nine times out of ten the home fans are with you no matter how rotten you are, but when they do turn their razz guns loose on a home-team player—well, what Kipling said about a woman scorned ain't *nothing*.

THE first hitter lifted a soft fly to center that Cabbagehead should have caught in his hip pocket. But he didn't even catch it in his glove. And when a moment later he tried to make a shoestring catch of a line drive over second, and let the pill get away for a home run, the skipper lifted him. It was the sensible thing to do. Cabbagehead was so rattled he couldn't have caught a balloon, not even if it had handles on it.

He was a pitiful sight leaving the

diamond. Everything about him seemed to have shrunk. He was a foot shorter, his spikes dragged the dirt, his shoulders sagged. He shambled to the bench with head bent and cap pulled down over his eyes. A young man suddenly grown old.

The tongue-lashing the skipper gave Spider Webb after the game would have knocked the paint off a cigar-store Indian. Spider took it like a little man and went over to apologize to Cabbagehead.

"It ain't your fault, Spider," Cabbagehead replied, trying pitifully to smile. "I ain't blamin' you. It ain't your fault if I'm dumb. But why was the crowd so rough on me? In the Grapevine the crowds liked me. The papers called me a crowd pleaser. Said I was a cinch to make the grade in the Big Show." His voice broke. "Man, how I hate to go back a failure, to have them point me out as the guy who ran to third instead of first."

There was an uncomfortable silence. For the first time in years I was conscious that the clubhouse smelled vilely of sweat and liniment. Cabbagehead sat motionless, staring straight ahead, while the rest of us, moving about with a great deal of unnecessary clatter, finished our dressing and drifted out in uncomfortable groups of twos and threes.

I was the last to go. I looked back as I went out the door. Cabbagehead was still sitting on the bench in front of his locker, a slouching figure in his spotless white uniform.

The skipper was standing just outside the door, a frown on his face.

"Well," I said, "I guess that finishes him."

"Depends," replied the skipper slowly. "He's in a tough spot, but he can win out if he's got the fight."

I shook my head. "Not a chance. He doesn't care now whether he makes good or not. It was the fans and not the boner that made him fold up. He wants to be popular with the fans more than anything else. Wants to be a 'crowd pleaser' like Babe Ruth, Ty Cobb, Jack Dempsey."

"I knew a man once," remarked the skipper, "who saved his life by shooting off his finger after it had been bitten by a rattlesnake. Maybe that would work in his case."

"What, shoot his head off?"

"Not exactly, no. But it'll amount to the same in the long run."

THE next afternoon the stands were filled to overflowing half an hour before game time. There was a feeling of tenseness in the air, a sort of undercurrent, that made you sense that a great and important event was about to occur.

When Cabbagehead came to bat there wasn't a sound. Not a boo, catcall, or raspberry greeted him. There was nothing but silence, that strange, emotional, pent-up silence that I've often noticed at a race track just before the start of the derby.

As he stepped up to the rubber a park attendant ducked around the corner of the Red bench and started for the plate. Under his arm he was carrying a big box done up in colored paper and tied with a red ribbon. The attendant handed the box to the umpire, pointed at Cabbagehead, and ran back toward the stand.

The Cincinnati infielders flocked up to the plate, and the rest of us boiled out of the dugouts and gathered around close, like so many kids. The umpire took off his mask and cap and handed the package to Cabbagehead, who was grinning all over.

"Open it! Open it!"

A leathery-voiced fan yelled that and the crowd took it up. I shot Spider Webb a look. He shrugged, shook his head.

"Open it! Open it!"

Cabbagehead stripped the paper from the box, removed the lid, and peered inside. We crowded in close, our heads together. There was an amazed gasp. The box contained an immense cabbagehead. On it was a card:

To Cabbagehead Carson—"The Crowd Pleaser." From the Fans.

Cabbagehead dropped the box and gave it a kick. It rolled one way, the cabbage the other. The stands rocked with laughter. There were cries of: "Yea, Cabbagehead!" and "Oh, you Cabbagehead!" He held up a hand for silence.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he roared in a voice that carried to all corners of the park, "I thank you for this token of your esteem. I only want to say you're the rottenest bunch of bum sports I've ever seen. And—"

That was as far as he got, a roar of boos drowned out his words. Some one threw a cushion and in a moment the air was full of them. Nothing like it had ever been seen in the big leagues. You would have thought that the umpire had just robbed the home club of the pennant. Through it all Cabbagehead stood facing the stands, his arms folded, his face twisted into a defiant sneer.

At last the crowd's fury spent itself and after the cushions had been gathered up—they had covered the infield like a carpet—we went on with the game. Cabbagehead, his jaw set tighter than a Scotchman's pocketbook, faced the pitcher. Every line of his

profile suggested grim determination and singleness of purpose. The pitcher gave him a dubious look and then let fly, waist high and inside. Cabbagehead timed it beautifully, swinging with every ounce of his steam.

It cleared the center field wall by fifty feet. The stands were silent as he jogged around the sacks. When he reached home there were a few hand-claps—just a few. He jerked off his cap, made a low bow—and then thumbed his nose at the crowd.

THAT was the beginning of the feud. From that day on the fans called him Cabbagehead. Day after day they packed the stands to razz him, going home happy whenever he pulled a "classic."

His answer was a fancy line of extra base knocks and a flock of sensational catches. The greater the crop of raspberries the harder he clubbed the apple. Let some one mention "runner's choice" and he immediately ran wild on the bases.

Well, it went along that way until the end of the season, Cabbagehead playing like a man possessed and breaking up game after game with his long distance clouting and daring base running. He continued to pull boners, of course—trying to steal second bases with the bags loaded was his favorite stunt—but without him in the line-up we'd never won the pennant. Yet the fans never quit riding him. To them everything he did was wrong.

The World's Series that year was a lulu. We should have beaten the Bears in a walk. But at the end of six games the series stood knotted at three all. Our pitching staff had cracked wide open, Spider Webb being the only chucker who seemed to puzzle the Bears. Two of our wins had been with

him on the hill. We grabbed the third by out-slugging our opponents in a crazy, free-hitting contest in which both clubs used five hurlers.

Naturally the skipper picked Spider to pitch the seventh and deciding game. The Bears sent Bullet Macy after us. He was a six-foot steel worker with a nasty hop on his fast ball, and he had shut us out in the second game. Both teams were fighting for the sixty per cent, and it was a real battle from the opening gong.

For five frames neither team got a man beyond second. Then we got a break. With two gone Rowdy Rollins hit one to the shortstop that should have been duck soup, but the ball took a funny hop and the Bear infielder juggled it long enough for Rowdy to beat the peg to first.

Cabbagehead came to the plate swinging a half dozen bats. He looked at a couple, then smacked one over the center-fielder's head. The pill rolled clear to the fence and Cabbagehead had all the time in the world to stretch it into a homer, but in rounding third he missed the bag by a foot. It was his first boner of the series and it cost us a run.

As usual the crowd tore him apart and fed him to the lions. They forgot that his hit had scored Rowdy. With the way Spider was chucking, that one run looked mighty big to us.

When the first Bear batter started the ninth by flying out to Cabbagehead, there was a general movement toward the exits. Their pitcher was up next and the Bear manager sent in a pinch hitter, a wry-necked youngster named Montgomery who had a reputation for being a streak on the bases.

He hit the first ball, a measly little roller along the third base line, and sprinted for first at a ten flat clip.

Baldy Brockman came in fast, scooped up the apple with one hand and shot it to first. The play was close, and from where I was it looked as if Baldy's throw beat Montgomery by a jump. Mike McGrew, the umpire, didn't think so. He called him safe.

We argued with Mike some, but we didn't get excited or call him any pet names. We figured the next two gents would be easy; they hadn't got a hit off of Spider during the entire series.

Biff Tracy was up next and after fouling off a couple, lifted an easy pop-fly to center field. I remember now how happy I was to see the pill go sailing out to Cabbagehead. That would make two outs and all we had to do was to retire the next hitter and the long end of the money was ours. I was already reading the figures on my check.

Cabbagehead didn't have to move out of his tracks. He just planted himself under it and waited for it to flop into his glove. Just like dropping doughnuts down a well. He might be dumb, but he never missed set-ups.

THEN it happened.

He made the catch all right, made it cleanly, but instead of tossing the apple back to the infield, he crammed it into his hip pocket and dashed for the clubhouse.

A horrified gasp rolled out from the stands. The Bear coaches yelled frantically at Montgomery, who was waiting, caught halfway between first and second. They finally made him understand. He ran back, touched first, and started around the bags. Meanwhile we were yelling and waving at Cabbagehead, but he kept legging it for the showers. There was only one thing to do, and we did it. The entire team except Red Dog Dawson, the

catcher, who stayed to guard the plate, took one look at Montgomery, lying down close to the ground and pawing the dirt in a way to make Kiki Cuyler look like a caterpillar tractor—and then we made a break for Cabbagehead.

In our park you reach the clubhouse through a door in the left field wall. During the game it is kept locked. Cabbagehead was pounding on it when he turned and saw us charging down upon him.

"No fair, fellows," he yelled, trying to slip away, "the ball's mine. Want to send it to my girl."

There was not time to argue, Montgomery was rounding third, so a dozen of us piled into him football fashion. He went down like a sack of coal. He struggled for an instant, then there was a snapping sound and he collapsed with a groan.

Hack Halstead yanked the ball from Cabbagehead's pocket, but by the time Hack kicked himself out of the mess and set himself for the throw Montgomery was almost home. The play wasn't even close, Montgomery hitting the dirt long before Red Dog got the apple. The score was tied, one all.

The police reserves were all that saved Cabbagehead.

"Kill him! Kill him!" yelled the crowd. "He's sold out to the gamblers! Kill that crook! He's trying to throw the game!"

Cabbagehead shuffled back to his position. His face was deadly white and his lips twitched. He realized now what he had done.

Spider was so rattled that he served up a soft one to the next hitter who promptly nailed it on the trade mark. Crack! Spider ducked and instinctively threw up his bare hand to guard his face. The smack of the bat and the

spat! of the ball against flesh and bone were like two handclaps, they were that close together. The force of the blow knocked Spider flat on his back, but he held onto the ball. Except for Cabbagehead's boner, the series would have been over.

As I helped Spider to his feet I saw there was blood on the ball.

"Are you hurt?" I cried.

For an answer he extended his pitching hand. The index finger was split to the bone. The skipper took one look at it and sent "Trader" Horne to the bull-pen on the run to warm up. Any one could see that Spider was through for the day.

Old Man Gloom stalked in our dug-out as the Bears, more chipper than dickey birds, took the field. With Spider still in the box we would have felt reasonably comfortable, but now Horne was the best we had and the Bears had knocked him off the hill early in his only series game. We realized that unless we won the game in our half, the Bears were a cinch to cop the big end of the money.

CABBAGEHEAD crept to the bench. His face was white and drawn, and he was all slumped over.

"I'm sorry, men," he stammered. "I swear I thought there were three out."

"Oh, shut up!" snapped Spider. "You shouldn't think, not with that head of yours. It don't even make a good hat rack. 'Cabbagehead'! The fans sure named you right!"

Some of the other fellows put in their oars and by the time Hank Wiley, our first hitter, waddled up to the pan, Cabbagehead had a pretty fair idea of what we thought of him. He never said a word, just looked at us like a

puppy whose master had given him his first whipping.

The Bears realized we were badly shaken and their new pitcher didn't waste much time with Hank. He got him in a hole, then caught him flat-footed with a curve that broke over the inside corner. Rowdy Rollins was up next. He lifted a weak pop to the Bear first baseman. It was Cabbagehead's turn.

He shot an anxious glance at the skipper. "Are you goin' to let me hit?"

"Jumpin' junefish!" growled the skipper. "An' you our best hitter! Certainly you're gonna hit. You may be dumb, but you sure can slug 'at old apple. Now give it a ride. Knock it outa the park. It's our only hope."

The fans greeted Cabbagehead with: "Take him out! Bench that crook!" A few—mighty few—showed their sportsmanship by clapping and calling upon him to make a comeback and save the series.

As usual, the Bear outfield hugged the fence and the infield laid back. The first ball was high; the umpire called it a ball. Suddenly I noticed Cabbagehead was holding the bat with one hand, his left one, and that instead of standing up straight with a slight hunch of his shoulders as he usually did, he was crouching over the plate. Then came the next pitch, over the plate, but low. Cabbagehead stuck out his bat, one-handed, and dropped a slow bunt along the third base line.

The pitcher dashed for it, and so did the third sacker. There was a slight mix-up, but finally the pitcher got the ball away. The stands were roaring, a blind man could see Cabbagehead had the peg beat. Then the roar turned into a groan for, even as the pill smacked into the first baseman's glove, Cabbagehead had rounded the bag at

full speed and was streaking for second.

The Bear first baseman hesitated, apparently at a loss to know what to do. Then, snapping out of it, he hastily shot the ball to second. But the throw was high and the second sacker had to jump for it. In his surprised eagerness to get the apple on Cabbagehead, who came flashing into the bag spikes first, the second-sacker dropped it. Cabbagehead jumped to his feet and tore for third.

The shortstop, who had backed up the throw, recovered the pill and instead of taking his time and setting himself, uncorked a wild heave that jumped between the third baseman's legs. The ball rolled to the stand and Cabbagehead rounded third and straightened out for home. He was halfway there when the Bear infielder caught up with the apple.

I was watching him come and when I heard the yelling suddenly die away, I knew the play was going to be close. Cabbagehead knew it, too. In front of him stood the Bears' backstop, legs braced for the shock and arms outstretched for the pill.

"Slide, Cabbagehead, slide!"

And just as I yelled it, he hit the ground in a hip-breaking slide. He and the ball arrived at the same moment. There was a cloud of dust and a long, tense second of doubt. Then the umpire, crouching over the play, slowly spread his hands. Cabbagehead was

safe! The game was ours! We were World's Champions!

THE Bear catcher untangled himself and walked away, but Cabbagehead didn't rise. The crowd, dancing and yelling and singing, didn't notice him. We gathered around him. He opened his eyes.

"Sorry, skipper," came his faint whisper. "I couldn't knock it out of the lot! Couldn't give the apple a ride! My—my right arm is broken—broke it in the mix-up at the clubhouse gate! Had to bunt and run wild on the bases. Had to make up for my boner. I—I knew I was dumb enough to get away with it. Listen to that crowd yell! Why—I guess I am a crowd pleaser after all!"

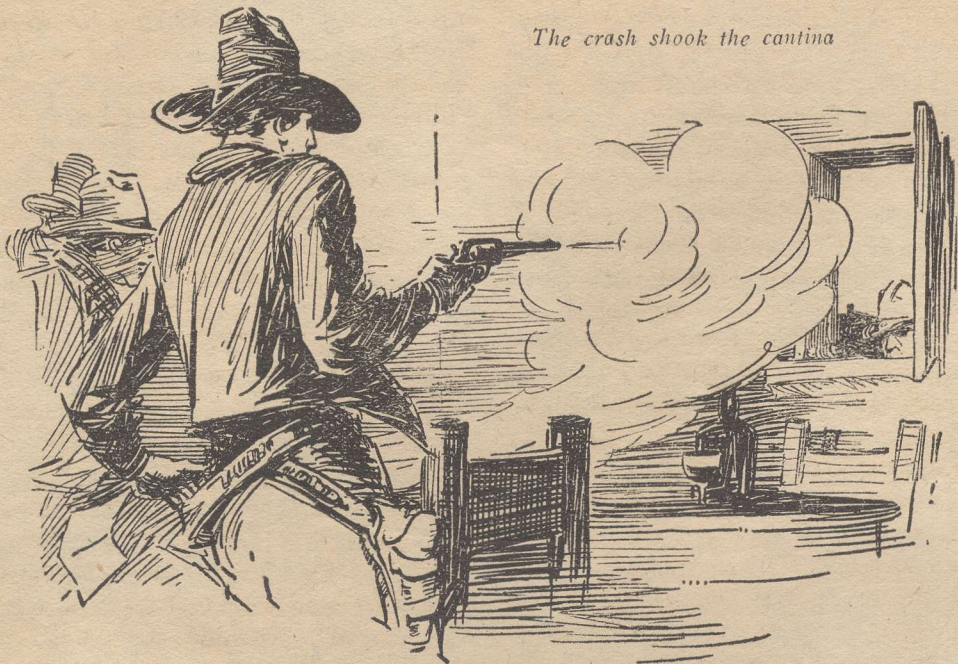
That night the skipper and I helped Cabbagehead to his window to see the torchlight procession pass. Practically the entire city was in the parade, and every man, woman, and child carried a cabbagehead!

"You know," remarked Cabbagehead, "I wish I knew who sent me that cabbage. I'd like to send him part of my series check. I feel like I owe him something. Wasn't for him, I'd be back in the bushes right now."

"Jumpin' junefish!" chuckled the skipper, "don't be a boob! You don't owe that bird anything. He's been paid. I saw to that, the minute he handed the cabbage to the park attendant."

THE END.





The Trail of Deceit

The most devious and deadly plot in the history of the rangeland comes to a smashing climax in the Mexican border town that "Lobo" Mendez rules

By W. C. TUTTLE

Author of "Bluffer's Luck," "Me and Peewee, Ltd.," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

GOOBER GLENDON and his young partner Johnny Wells are in Silver Bar when Jigger Slade, a range detective hired by Frank Austin, owner of the Star A, is shot. Sheriff Nolan says wild young Hal Austin, Frank's son, did it while drunk, in self-defense; but Goober, pocketing Hal's gun, finds it was clean, unfired.

Austin, coming to his ranch near Keno City with his rich wife and his daughter Betty, as a result of foreman Cal Sands's reports of Hal's wildness, believes Cal's statement that Nolan had

covered up Hal's shooting Slade in the back; and Austin gives Sands the half-interest in the Star A which he had planned to give Hal. He also confides his secret: that he never got a divorce from Rosita Diaz, whom he now finds to be still alive, in the border town of Indian Wells, and the mother of Juana Diaz, the girl Hal has wooed under an assumed name and taken away from Sands. Rosita's twin sister and her baby are dead, but the sister's husband, Porfiro "Lobo" Mendez, is boss of the Mexican border town of Piñon.

This story began in the Argosy for June 14.

Sands, who had been given five thousand dollars by Austin to bribe the Silver Bar sheriff, Nolan, now gives three Star A men—Riecho, Elkinson, and Britton—Austin's checks for two hundred and fifty dollars to kidnap Mrs. Austin and Betty *en route* to Indian Wells. But the women are kidnaped before they reach the appointed spot, and Riecho, driving the buckboard, is killed. Goober finds the check and a stolen ring in Riecho's pockets.

An attempt to kill Goober, which he blames on Terrill of the 7 Bar 7, a former outlaw and deadly foe, leads Goober and Johnny to that ranch in time to see Terrill murdered by some one from Silver Bar. Later they follow the two 7 Bar 7 hands to a box cañon—and watch an ambush which wipes out those two guardians of stolen horses. Near where the ambush took place, he and Johnny stumble on the dead body of Sheriff Nolan.

Goober and Frank Austin alike come to the same conclusion about the kidnaping—that Mendez had done it, and had possibly taken the women to Piñon. This was borne out by the fact that Juana Diaz also has been carried off.

Hal gets a note from Betty, telling him to come alone with the Mexican who bears it, and he does. Austin, in Indian Wells with Sands and the two hands Elkinson and Britton, on their way to Piñon, is kidnaped also.

CHAPTER XX.

A FOG OF GUN SMOKE.

ROSITA from her window on the patio had seen Austin enter the Casa, and she saw him go away, after questioning the musician. She asked the man what Austin wanted,

and was told he was looking for Hal. Rosita had gone back to her room, when a tapping on the grille of a rear window caused her to investigate.

It was Ricardo Gonzales, half-drunk, but very serious.

"What do you want, Ricardo?" she asked anxiously.

"But a word, *señora*; a word in confidence. If you would witness a marriage, go to Piñon this night."

"Juana?" she asked breathlessly.

"*Sí, señora.* This is in confidence. I am not to tell any one."

"Thank you, Ricardo."

The Mexican faded away in the darkness, and Rosita turned quickly to her riding clothes. She had feared this with a fear greater than any she had ever known. Mendez would marry Juana whether the girl agreed or not. An old priest of Piñon would willingly do Mendez's bidding. Not much of a priest, but nevertheless a priest. Rosita drew a heavy revolver from an old chest of drawers and put it inside her waist. Slipping on her boots, she pinched out the candles, and glided through a rear door.

It was about this time that Sheriff La Plante and his deputy, Smoky Hill, rode into town, and were met by Goober and Johnny, who quickly told them about the four men from the Star A, who were in town, carrying rifles on their saddles.

"Seen anythin' of Hal?" the sheriff asked Goober.

"Yeah, and had a talk with him about yore warrant. He didn't seem much excited about it, but a little later he rode down the street. It might be that he stepped over into Mexico, although he didn't act that scared."

"He can stay down there, as far as I'm concerned," growled Pete. "But where do yuh reckon them Star A fel-

lers are goin' with the rifles? If they wasn't lookin' for trouble, they wouldn't be takin' rifles along. I don't believe they came through Keno City."

"Prob'ly circled the town," said Goober. "They didn't want you to see 'em go through."

"Yuh don't suppose they're goin' to Mexico, do yuh?" asked Smoky.

"Might be."

They strolled past the *cantina* and could see Sands and the two hands, Elkinson and Britton, at the bar. From there they went over to the Casa del Diaz and had a drink at the bar, but there was no sign of Frank Austin.

"I'm shore he came over here," said Goober.

As they stood at the bar Cal Sands came in. He nodded to them and went to the patio, but came back in a few moments.

"Pete, have yuh seen anythin' of Frank Austin?" he asked.

"Nope," replied the sheriff.

"Yuh don't mean to say you've lost him, too, do yuh?" queried Smoky. "Gosh, you Star A punchers shore are careless."

Sands flushed angrily, but did not reply.

"Yuh don't want to lose track of him," grinned Smoky. "He might git absent-minded and give yuh the other half of the ranch."

Smoky had drunk enough to be sarcastic, and Pete kicked him on the ankle as warning not to go too far. Smoky laughed and turned to the bar. Sands shifted his eyes to Pete La Plante.

"Yore friend seems amused at his own wit, Pete."

"I wouldn't take it any further, if I was you," said Goober calmly.

"Yuh wouldn't, eh?" snorted Sands. "Who the hell are you, anyway?"

Goober grinned softly. "Want to know who I am?"

"I asked yuh, didn't I?"

"I'm the jasper that stole Hal Austin's gun that night in Silver Bar."

Sands's eyes narrowed. "Oh, is that so? And what good did that do you?"

"You'd prob'ly be astonished, Sands," Goober said softly.

"Yea-a-a-ah?" Sands seemed at a loss just what to say, when one of the musicians, still carrying his guitar, came into the *cantina*, and Sands turned to him.

"Have you seen Frank Austin here to-night, Perez?"

The Mexican nodded. "Yes, he was 'ere for moment, but went away. He ask me eef I see hees son, and I say he gone away."

Sands nodded and walked out, paying no further attention to the four men at the bar.

"**W**HAT about that gun, Goober?" queried the sheriff.

"There was two empty shells in the cylinder, but the gun hadn't been shot."

"You mean—young Austin never fired them shots?"

"No more than I did, but we can't prove it now. Only our word that the gun hadn't been cleaned by us."

"You mean that Sands had anythin' to do with it?"

"I can't prove a thing—no matter what I feel. But I've got a scheme. It may not work; prob'ly won't; however, c'mon, anyway."

Sands was boiling with rage when he left the Casa del Diaz, and as he started away from the front door he came face to face with Ricardo Gonzales. As swiftly as the attack of a panther Sands grasped Gonzales by the throat and crashed him up against

the adobe wall beside the lighted window. The Mexican, his eyes bulging out, fought for his breath against those muscular hands. Suddenly Sands released one hand, drew his gun, and shoved the cold muzzle against Gonzales's neck.

"Talk fast, greaser," he said hoarsely. "Where's Mendez?"

"Piñon," wheezed the half-choked Mexican. "*Por Dios, señor!*"

"Piñon, eh? Where is Juana Diaz? Speak the truth or I kill you."

"Piñon, Señor Sands. To-night she weds."

"Weds? Don't lie, greaser. You mean she marries Porfiro Mendez to-night?"

Gonzales nodded. "I believe," he said simply, and the next instant he went sprawling from a right-hand smash on the jaw, sagging limply on the ground against the wall, while Sands strode back toward the main street.

He laughed to himself as he crossed to the *cantina*. Venting his wrath on a poor Mexican, he had received some information he did not expect. Austin was not in the *cantina*, and the other two cowboys looked at him inquiringly.

"Can't find him," growled Sands. "Where in hell do you suppose he went? But I got some information from Dick Gonzales—choked it out of him. Mendez is goin' to marry Juana Diaz in Piñon to-night—unless we stop it."

"Do you believe that greaser?" asked Elkinson. "How about him givin' us a bum steer, eh? Maybe Mendez and his Yaquis are—"

"Scared?" asked Sands.

"No, I ain't scared."

"We can pull out of here, like we are goin' home," Sands said, "then

circle wide and head for Piñon. We don't need to ride the road."

"But what about Austin?" asked Britton. "We don't want to go without him."

"I can't find him. Somethin' has happened to him. I went to the—"

"Señor Sands?"

Sands whirled quickly to see a small Mexican, his brown hands holding a crumpled envelope.

"What do you want?" snarled Sands.

"*Carta*, Señor Sands," he said simply, handing Sands the grimy envelope.

"What's this?" muttered Sands, examining the envelope.

It was addressed to Cal Sands, Keno City, Arizona, but bore no postmark and the stamp had not been canceled. It was sealed, but had been opened across one end.

Sands inserted a forefinger and thumb, drawing out the folded piece of paper, which he opened. There were only a few scrawled lines. His eyes flashed to the signature, and he stiffened quickly, his eyes shifting from window to door. Everything seemed all right. A couple of Mexicans were shaking dice at one end of the bar, one man was asleep at a table, his two cowboys stood beside him wondering what it was all about.

His eyes flashed back to the letter, quickly scanning the penned lines. His face twisted strangely, mouth partly open. There was a face at the window—Goober Glendon. The letter dropped from Sands's hand, and it was still falling when Sands drew and fired through the window.

The crash of the heavy shot shook the little *cantina*. Sands flung himself sidewise along the bar, landing on his hands and knees, crawling swiftly into

the rear room. It had happened so swiftly that Elkinson and Britton stood there gawping, trying to understand what it was all about.

Then the door was flung open, and Pete La Plante yelled:

"Come out, boys; the game is up."

"Sands is gone!" yelled Smoky.

"Watch that back patio, Johnny."

It was then that Elkinson and Britton came to life. Their guns were out, and they were coming straight for the door, shooting wildly, trying to carve their way to freedom, their bullets smacking against the adobe walls across the street. Out through the fog of smoke they came.

There were other shots, which were not smacking against adobe.

Dave Elkinson pitched out through the doorway, and Britton fell over him, his gun flying from his hand. Pete and Smoky fell upon them quickly, while Goober, blood running down his face, which had been cut by flying glass, stumbled into the fog of the *cantina* and retrieved that letter.

THERE had been two shots fired behind the *cantina*, both fired by Sands as he vaulted over the patio wall and almost fell on Johnny Wells; and Johnny was staggering around with a slight scalp wound and a powder-burned forehead.

But Johnny knew which way Sands had gone, and was on his trail, running through littered alleys and around to the main street. Johnny fell over a broken barrel, lost his gun, and was obliged to waste valuable seconds in recovering it.

He reached the street in time to see Sands spurring his horse down the street away from the *cantina* where the shooting had been done. It was not Sands's horse; it was Smoky's horse.

Johnny might have been justified in yelling for assistance, but he never thought of such a thing. Into his saddle he went, and went racing down the street, following the escaping foreman of the Star A.

Elkinson and Britton, the fight knocked out of both of them, were dragged back into the *cantina*. The bartender had decamped, the two dice-shaking Mexicans had gone out through a window, the drunk asleep against the table was now under the table on all fours, coughing in the powder-smoke.

Smoky came running in from the rear.

"Sands got away, and Johnny must be after him!" he yelled.

"What in hell went wrong?" asked Elkinson hoarsely. "Sands started shootin' and— What was in that damn letter?"

"Enough to hang the whole bunch of yuh," replied Goober. "You fellers looted the Star A—you and Terrill's outfit, with the assistance of the sheriff over at Silver Bar. Sands killed Terrill, and between the three of yuh you killed Nolan and the two 7 Bar 7 punchers. Elkinson, you'll hang for the murder of Jigger Slade."

"Not by a damn sight, I don't!" squawked Elkinson. "Nolan killed Jigger, because Jigger knew Nolan was a rustler and was goin' to tell Austin."

"That's yore story. Both of you will stretch rope, that's a cinch."

"Not me," groaned Britton. "You can't hang me for helpin' kill them two 7 Bar 7 horse-thieves. It was Sands who killed Nolan that day. Me and Dave never had no hand in that."

"No, but you helped rustle horses. When a horse-thief kills a horse-thief, it's murder. And you two tried to

murder me back there on the road, the day Riecho was killed. Unless I'm mistaken one of you killed Riecho."

"I swear we didn't," wailed Dave. "Riecho was our bunkie."

"Which one of you two helped Riecho hold up the stage that mornin' and rob Austin and the women?" demanded Goober.

"Are yuh goin' to let us set here and die?" asked Britton. "I'm all shot to hell, I tell yuh."

"Which one of yuh helped him?"

"I did, damn yuh. Now git a doctor for us, Johnny Wise."

"All right," nodded Goober, a grim smile on his lips.

The sheriff looked blankly at Goober.

"But where are Sands and Johnny?" wondered Smoky.

Quite a crowd had collected, and a Mexican pushed forward.

"Two men left town," he said. "It was just after the shooting. One came running to the street above here and mounted a horse. In a few moments a man followed him, also mounting a horse. Both men were without hats."

"Which way did they go?" asked Goober anxiously.

"South, *señor*—and going very fast."

"Sands has headed into Mexico, and we'll never get him," said Pete.

"I'll bet on Johnny," replied Goober. "Pete, you'll have to stay here with yore prisoners, while me and Smoky go huntin' for Johnny. Mebbe we'll have to go plumb to Mexico City; Johnny's first name is Bulldog."

Smoky swore over the loss of his favorite horse, but climbed on Pete's horse, left the stirrups as they were, and galloped out of town, knees almost up to the fork of the saddle.

"What the hell was it all about?"

yelled Smoky. "Why did Sands kill Terrill and Nolan?"

"The three of 'em were looting the Star A," replied Goober. "As soon as Austin gave Sands a half interest he wanted to quit stealin' Star A, and he wanted them to quit; but the game was too good. They wanted their cut, or they'd expose Sands."

"Well, for the love of gosh! How long have you known that?"

"About five minutes," Goober grinned.

CHAPTER XXI.

MENDEZ'S SURPRISE.

"NO, I do not know what it is about." Juana shook her head as she watched the two Yaqui Indians setting up a long table in their room.

"But you understand their language," insisted Mrs. Austin.

"Certainly; but they do not talk of what they are doing."

The big table properly placed, the two men went out and brought in some big colored cloths, which were spread on the table. Then they brought in some huge old silver pieces, some big candelabra fitted with wax candles, and finally a miscellaneous collection of silver dishes.

"It looks very much as though we might be going to have a party," said Betty.

Juana shuddered and turned away. "I believe I understand," she said. "It is for a wedding."

"How wonderful!" exclaimed Betty.

"Wonderful for whom?" asked Juana dully.

"Why, for us. I'd love to see a Mexican wedding."

"Would you like to marry some one you do not love—one you hate?"

"Certainly not. I don't understand what you mean, Juana."

"Wait and see." Juana was tense.

"You worry me," complained Mrs. Austin. "Surely no one would have to marry—"

"This is Mexico, *señora*."

"I realize that, but—"

Mrs. Austin paused as Porfiro Mendez came through the doorway. The big Mexican was as picturesque as stamped leather, silk, and silver could make a man. He might have stepped out of grand opera—or comic opera. Behind him came a priest, and such a priest! Tall and gaunt, a nose like an eagle's beak, deeply sunken eyes, toothless mouth, and a skin like a mummy. His hood was thrown back to disclose a hairless head, perfectly round, atop a skinny neck. His arms were abnormally long, his huge, bony hands clutching at his robe as he grinned toothlessly at the three women.

"*Madre de Dios!*" whispered Juana.

Mendez smiled expansively.

"That is my uncle," said Juana.

"Ah, my leetle Juana," lisped Mendez, whose upper lip was still swollen from Austin's blow.

"*Puerco!*" replied Juana. "You pig, why did you steal these women, Lobo Mendez? You are the son of a pig, a creature too vile to name."

The priest looked inquiringly at Porfiro, who laughed amusedly.

"Thees *padre* can not hear," he said. "He ees ver' 'armless, biccuse he can not 'ear nor bite."

"*Señora* and *señorita*," Mendez swept off his silver-trimmed sombrero and made an elaborate bow to Mrs. Austin and Betty. "I welcome you to the poor 'ome of Porfiro Mendez. You will please excuse eef I 'ave not ap-

proach' you biffore. But I am extreme' busy man."

"You are very big' liar," corrected Juana, and Mendez laughed.

"You mus' excuse Juana," he said. "She ees my seester's leetle girl, and she feel free to call me anything. But I am ver' forgiving."

"But why were we stolen and kept here?" asked Mrs. Austin.

Mendez shrugged his shoulders. "That ees something I prefer to show—not tell. A leetle later maybe I shall—uh—what you call demon-demon-strite. Is that right word? You mus' excuse my Englis'."

"Does my mother know where I am?" demanded Juana.

"*Quién sabe, dulce amiga?* By this time, I thenk so. I kindly send her an invitation to the wedding. Perhaps," shrugging his big shoulders, "she do not care to come."

"What wedding?" Juana snapped.

"'Ere to-night."

"Whose wedding?"

Mendez laughed at her. "I 'ave select a 'usband for you. You wan' be ol' maid? Hm-m-m-m," he looked thoughtfully at Betty. "I'm don't like see one pretty girl cheated. Maybe I find 'usband for you, too."

"But I do not want a husband," said Betty, just a trifle frightened, though she hardly could take all this seriously.

Mendez lifted his brows slightly. "I am Porfiro Mendez, and I am only man in Piñon who is not refused, *señorita*. I take w'at I want."

"But that is absurd," said Mrs. Austin severely. "You cannot do a thing like that. Perhaps you do not know who we are."

"*Sí*, I know. I know your 'usband ver' well, *señora*. From heem I get this."

He brushed aside his mustache, exposing his swollen lips and gums.

"You see? For that he shall pay Porfiro Mendez personally. No man strike Porfiro Mendez and not pay well."

"You do this for revenge, eh?" queried Juana.

"We-e-e-ell—now, yes. At firs'—well, no matter. I weel be satisfy."

HE touched the priest on the shoulder and they started for the door, but at that moment two armed Yaqui Indians came in, prodding Hal Austin ahead of them. His hands were bound behind his back, but he was neither gagged nor blindfolded.

Mendez looked at him and laughed heartily.

"W'at 'ave we 'ere? Ha, ha, ha, ha! Thees brave man from Indian Wells come all the way to save hees seester."

Mrs. Austin and Betty started toward Hal, but the guards stepped between them, blocking their advance. Hal looked as though he had been in a fight, and one of the Yaquis had one eye swollen shut. Hal looked at Betty accusingly.

"I received your note," Hal said.

"I feex up that note," laughed Mendez. "One of my men is so sympathetic, and he offer to take note to you from your seester. She ver' glad to write it. You see, I theenk of many thing to make my guests 'appy."

Mendez stepped behind Hal and quickly untied his bonds.

"You are not tied," the Lobo said, "but you would be ver' foolish to try and escape."

Mendez then walked out with the priest, and one of the Yaqui Indians stood inside the door, leaning on his rifle. Hal looked around the room,

shrugged his shoulders and went over to Juana.

"What does it mean, Juana?" he asked, indicating the table.

"Oh, Hal, I—I'm afraid Mendez means to force me to marry him."

"So that's why the big brute kidnapped you, eh? We'll see about that." Hal turned to his mother and threw an arm around her shoulder. "Are you all right, mother?"

She began to cry on his shoulder, and he turned to Betty.

"Have you been mistreated, Betty?"

"No, Hal; not in the least. The beds and food might be better, but we have not suffered, except in spirit. It seems as though we have been here years. Hasn't anything been done to rescue us? Why hasn't dad—"

"No one knows where you are, Betty. Our hands have been tied. There did not appear to be any reason for suspecting Mendez. Damn his greasy hide, I'd like to twist his head off. What about this marriage? Hasn't he told you anything about it?"

"He—he said he had a husband for Juana; and he said he might have one for me."

"But you know he can't do a thing like that," sobbed Mrs. Austin.

Hal shook his head miserably. "Mother, we're up against a tough deal. This Mendez is like a king in this place. He owns everybody, and his word is law."

"But such a marriage is not legal, Hal."

"Not from a civilized viewpoint, mother. But what does Mendez care? If he wanted Juana or Betty, he'd take them, marriage or no marriage. And who could stop him? Don't you see, we are absolutely at the mercy of a man who is no better than a wolf. 'Lobo' they call him, and that's what he is."

"But there must be a way out, Hal."

"I wish I knew where it is. I haven't even a pocket knife."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Hal," said Betty tearfully. "It is my fault that you are here. I believed the Mexican would give you that note in secret."

"They are all owned by Mendez. Don't blame yourself; you did what you thought was right. I walked right into an ambush. It was evident that they didn't want to hurt me, but I sure slugged a couple of them good and hard. As far as that note was concerned, Mendez schemed it all out. Just why he wanted me down here, I don't know."

"To see him marry me," said Juana bitterly.

"Did you see the priest?" asked Betty.

Hal nodded grimly. "Looks like a mummy. What a mug that *padre* wears!" He went over and put an arm around Juana. "Brace up, sweetheart. You are not Mendez's wife yet. Something will turn up. We can't lose faith."

"What good is faith against treachery?" she asked miserably.

"Well, let's wait and see." He turned to his mother. "You have met Juana and been with her a while. Have you any objections to our marriage—if we had a chance?"

"Your father—" Mrs. Austin began, but Hal stopped her.

"Dad doesn't figure in this at all, mother; I want your frank and unbiased opinion."

Mrs. Austin looked at Juana for several moments. "I—I think I should give you my blessing, Hal."

"You could have mine—if it is worth anything," said Betty rather tearfully.

"I thank you both," said Juana

softly. "It is good to know that such a thing might have been."

THE Yaqui turned quickly to the door and flung it open. As he stepped back a woman in riding costume, her arms bound to her sides, a cloth gag between her teeth, came in, escorted by a squat Mexican.

"Mother!" cried Juana, and ran toward her, but the Yaqui shoved her back. The Mexican took one of the chairs from the table and forced Mrs. Diaz to sit down, but he did not offer to take off the ropes or take away the gag.

Juana was furious, but the Mexican barred her way, threatening her with his gun, and she backed slowly.

"Oh, what a dirty shame!" gritted Hal impotently. "At least ask them to take off that dirty gag, Juana."

Juana spoke swiftly to the Mexican, who shook his head and refused.

"Is that the orders of Mendez?" she asked in Spanish.

"Yes—the orders of Mendez."

The Mexican backed to the doorway and leaned on his rifle. Now there were two armed guards.

"Mother, you are not hurt?" asked Juana anxiously.

Mrs. Diaz, unable to speak, shook her head, indicating that she had not been hurt. But the gag must have been very painful, as it drew back the corners of her mouth cruelly.

"Why do they torture her that way and leave the rest of us free?" asked Betty. "What has she done to Mendez?"

Juana shook her head sadly. "Who knows what Mendez will do? Mother has always treated him well enough."

"She ordered him to never come in her place again," said Hal. "It was after dad knocked him down."

"Why did your father knock him down?" asked Juana.

"I don't know, sweetheart. I think your mother heard what was said between them. Perhaps that is why he is doing this to her."

Juana shook her head sadly. It was something she did not understand.

"Hal," said Mrs. Austin huskily, "was Tony Riecho killed when we were kidnapped?"

Hal nodded. "Shot twice. Since you disappeared, Nolan, the sheriff over at Silver Bar, has been killed, and both cowboys at the 7 Bar 7 were shot down. Some one tried again to kill Goober Glendon, the old cowboy, but all they succeeded in doing was making his head sore. He seems to bear a charmed life."

"Was he the old cowboy with that good-looking youngster?" Mrs. Austin asked.

"Yes. The young cowboy's name is Johnny Wells."

"Johnny Wells," smiled Betty. "He is good-looking, Hal."

"And very likable," said Hal slowly. "But that is neither here nor there. I'd be mighty glad to see even a homely cow-puncher, if he had a gun. I—I'd almost welcome Cal Sands, as much as I detest him."

Juana tried to edge over closer to her mother, but the Mexican spoke sharply to her, and she came back. The Yaqui grinned, and as some one knocked on the door, he opened it quickly. It was Mendez, a little more drunk, his arms full of bottles of wine and *tequila*. He paid no attention to Rosita Diaz, until he had stacked the bottles on the table. Then he turned and looked at her, a scowl on his face.

"So Ricardo gave you my message, eh? And you come to see wedding. Good. Nouse to try spik, my dear

seester-in-law. Thees time is not proper for you to spik. You like see marriage, eh? You like see leetle Juana marry? Maybe nex' time you theenk biffore you insult Porfiro Mendez. You know now, eh? Ha, ha, ha! For one time I'm 'ave woman w'ere she can't spik.

"'Ow you like, Juana, eh? I'm ver' sorry, but your mother mus' not interrupt wedding. She see much, but speak notink. I wait one hour more, biccuse we may 'ave one more guest, and then we 'ave wedding. Plenty *vino, tequila*, much roas' cheeken; beeg wedding *fiesta*. Oh, all ver' nice. Porfiro Mendez do everything ver' nice. He even pay *padre*."

MENDEZ swelled with importance and twisted his mustaches.

Finally he took a bottle, knocked off the long neck against the edge of the table, poured out a huge tumblerful, and held it up to the light of the candles.

"*Una brindis!* W'at you call 'toast,' eh? To thees bride!" He drained the glass and wiped his mustaches with his open palm.

"Ah-h-h-ha!" He threw up his head and listened. One of the guards grunted and threw open the door.

"*Entre!*" snapped a voice outside, and in came Frank Austin, stumbling, almost falling. His hands were bound behind him, a gag between his teeth. He was a picture of abject misery, as Mendez drew a chair out beside Rosita Diaz, and the guard forced him to occupy it.

"Frank!" exclaimed Mrs. Austin.

"Dad!" Betty started for him, only to be shoved back against her mother, who had had the same idea.

"Stay there," ordered Mendez harshly. Austin seemed dazed, as his

eyes swept the room, probably wondering what it was all about. Mendez turned to his guards, spoke swiftly to them in Spanish, and they all went out, but their places were taken by Ricardo and Miguel Gonzales. Ricardo caressed a swollen jaw, where Sands's knock-out blow had landed, and sowed at the Americans.

"You dog!" Juana flung at Ricardo, and Miguel laughed.

"W'y you laugh?" growled Ricardo.

"Thees lady know you ver' well," his brother said with a grin.

"Shut off!"

"Bot' of you shut up!" roared Mendez.

"Ricardo die from sore jaw pretty soon," laughed Miguel. "He say 'orse keek heem. I bet your life eet was *Americano* 'orse weeth two leg."

"*Calle!*" roared Mendez. "No talk."

"Sure," grinned the irrepressible Miguel. "I'm shut off like clem."

"Clem?" jeered Ricardo.

"I say clem. Clem jus' like hoyster."

"I make hoyster from you," snarled Mendez. "Not speak! I myself personally weel do the talking."

"*Gracias.*"

"Thees 'orse, Ricardo," whispered Miguel loudly, "ees w'at color?"

Crash! Mendez's bottle of *tequila* barely missed Miguel's head, and smashed to splinters against the wall.

"No spik," promised Miguel. "All t'rough, Onkle Porfiro."

Mendez was furious. He glared at them viciously for several moments, but finally a smile overspread his face. He picked up two bottles, drew out the corks and handed them to the brothers.

"I'm forget that you are dry," he said apologetically.

"Sure," grinned Miguel. "Too dry for talk."

There was no doubt of their thirst, for they drank the potent *tequila* as an ordinary drinker might imbibe a light wine—not that they were able to handle it any better than a white man, but it seemed as though their gullets were composed of rawhide or some similarly durable material.

Frank Austin seemed fascinated by the scene. His eyes shifted from one to the other, and finally to the gagged figure beside him, as though seeking an answer to why they were here.

"Well," said Mendez, "there ees no reason for delay now. We are all 'ere. Ricardo, call the *padre.*"

There were a few moments of silence, as Ricardo came back with the priest, who had apparently been coached in the business of the marriage. Slowly he advanced across the room, holding a book before him, and halted in front of Rosita Diaz and Frank Austin, facing away from them.

PORFIRO MENDEZ smiled at Juana and motioned her to step forward, but she only drew back, fearful of what was about to happen. "Come," said Mendez firmly. "You cannot escape. I do not like to force a lady."

"Mendez, this is a rotten thing," said Hal, stepping forward. "Don't do it. I'll admit we can't stop you, but sooner or later you will be hunted down like a real lobo and killed. Stop and think what it means."

Mendez grinned slowly. "You don't like this idea? Well, I am ver' much surprise'. All this time I theenk you wan' marry Juana; and now you say eet ees rotten theeng."

"Me marry Juana?" gasped Hal, not understanding.

"W'y not? Young folks in love sometime marry."

Juana and Hal were looking blankly at each other. It was something they could not understand.

"The *padre* ees waiting," said Mendez.

Hal turned to Mendez. "Is this on the square, Mendez? Do you mean that I am to marry Juana?"

"*Seguramente*. Sure."

"Juana, do you understand it?"

"No, I—"

"All right," said Hal rather breathlessly. "I'm ready."

He took Juana by the arm and they stepped up in front of the *padre*. Frank Austin squirmed in agony in his chair, trying to twist the gag between his teeth, but his efforts were futile. The *padre* was intoning in a mixture of Latin and Spanish, and, as far as any of them understanding it, he might as well have been talking to himself.

Mrs. Austin had her arm around Betty, and the two of them, white-faced, were leaning forward, fairly holding their breath. Frank Austin, exhausted with his efforts, slumped in his chair, his stricken, horrified eyes on the floor.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIESTA IN PIÑON.

WHEN Johnny Wells went pounding out of Indian Wells, following the fleeing Sands, he had no idea where the chase might lead. They whirled out around a cluster of adobe buildings, away from the lights, and swept into the open country, with only the stars for illumination.

Johnny had a good horse, but he realized that Sands had taken Smoky's sorrel, a running fool. They struck a dusty road, which helped Johnny in following Sands. Of course he had no

idea when he might run into Sands in the dark, but he was willing to take chances.

He had a hunch that they were heading south, and were already far across the border, but that meant little to Johnny Wells. He wanted Cal Sands, and he was going to get Cal Sands, if such a thing was possible. There was no sound except the *sug, sug, sug* of his horse's hoofs in the dirt. Sands might turn off the road any time and double back on him, but Johnny rode high in his stirrups, running through the dust from Sands's horse.

Cal Sands was not sure that any one was pursuing him, nor did he care. He realized that everything had broken against him, and that he would be a hunted man in Arizona or any other State. His only move was to head down through Mexico.

But first he was going to Piñon. Half crazed from the way Fate had brought his future tumbling about his ears, he was going to prevent Mendez from marrying Juana Diaz. His future, beyond that one thing, was rather vague. Perhaps he might take Juana south with him. Why not? The only thing left for him was freedom in Mexico, and why not have a pleasant freedom?

He realized whose horse he had taken, and derived pleasure from it. He owed Smoky something for those remarks in the Casa del Diaz, and this sorrel with the speed of the wind evened things up a little. Then he saw the lights of Piñon a mile ahead.

Reckless as he was, he realized that Mendez was not misnamed the Wolf. There would be guards, but Sands reasoned that the guards would only be at Mendez's house. Sands had been there many times. He knew Piñon as well as he knew Keno City; so he

swung off the road, circled the town and came in behind an old tumble-down wall not over a hundred yards from the walls of Mendez's home.

The darkness favored Sands, and he invariably dressed in black. Crouching low he worked his way in close to the wall. To his right was the big arched entrance to the patio, and Sands felt sure there were guards at that gate. He pulled off his boots and left them beside the wall, gripping his heavy six-shooter in his right hand, as he hunched over and went softly toward the gate.

There was a guard, a keen-eared Yaqui, just inside the gate, but just now he was rolling a cigarette and failed to hear anything. Sands flattened himself against the wide gate-post. He heard the Yaqui scratch a match to light his cigarette.

Slowly Sands straightened up, a pebble in his hand, and with a flip of his wrist sent it rolling along the opposite side of the gate. The sound was very slight, but the Yaqui heard it. The muzzle of a rifle came past Sands, and the Yaqui leaned out, only to go down in a heap from the slash of a heavy revolver barrel across his head.

But unfortunately the rifle must have been cocked and the Yaqui's finger on the trigger, because as the Indian went down the rifle was discharged. Sands vaulted the Indian and made a dash for the front door.

JOHNNY WELLS didn't know where to go; so he rode straight through Piñon, and was on the street, just beyond Mendez's place, when he saw the flash and heard the report of the rifle. Swinging his horse in against an adobe wall, he dismounted quickly and came running softly.

As he reached the gate, almost falling over the prostrate Indian, he saw the flash of another gun at the front door of the house, and heard the door crash shut. Johnny went running around through the patio, searching for another way into the house.

But there was no door. There was light through a barred window—the window of the room where the women had been kept prisoners. Johnny ran past, but here the wall angled to the right, ending against the wall of the building. Quickly he climbed to the top of the wall, where he could see over the old tile roof.

The main building was of two stories, and he could see over the roofs to a window, faintly lighted. If he could crawl over the old roof and reach the window, he might get into the house; so he removed his boots, balanced on the top of the wall and made a leap which landed him on the roof.

The wedding ceremony was over. The hideous old priest gave them his blessing, and stepped back, a wide smile showing his toothless gums. Juana and Hal looked at each other foolishly, and Mendez laughed mockingly.

"Married," he chuckled. "And now I kees the bride, me myself personally."

And before Juana could stop him he had grasped her in his arms and kissed her with his swollen lips. She staggered back, holding a hand over her mouth. Hal threw both arms around her, fearing what else Mendez might do, but at that moment they heard the dull report of a rifle shot.

Mendez jerked back, whirled toward the door. The Gonzales brothers had emptied their quart bottles, and although they jerked to attention, it was evident that they were too muddled to do anything. Miguel dropped his rifle and had difficulty in recovering it.

Another shot, but this time it sounded within the house. Mendez drew one of his two guns and sprang toward the door. Fumblingly Ricardo jerked it open, and a man came into them like a tiger, knocking Ricardo back into Mendez, who dropped his gun and almost fell over backward. Miguel threw up his rifle, but a well-placed kick sent him writhing to the floor.

It was Cal Sands, a heavy revolver in his right hand, blood running down from a cut over one eye. He glanced over the stunned group, as he leaned back against the wall for a moment, panting, mouth wide open. Then he relieved Mendez of his guns, kicked the rifle aside and shut the door.

"Get up, you dog!" he snarled at Mendez, who got slowly to his feet.

"Thank God!" exclaimed Mrs. Austin. "Cal Sands."

Sands looked at her narrowly. "God ain't got a thing to do with this," he panted. "Stay where yuh are—all of yuh. What's been goin' on, Mendez?"

"Juana and Hal were just married," said Mrs. Austin, not waiting for Mendez to answer.

"Juana and Hal?" Sands blinked at this information. His eyes strayed to the gagged figures on the two chairs, and began to understand.

"So Mendez engineered this, eh? Hal, you poor damn fool, that wife of yours is your half-sister."

"What do you say?" choked Hal. "My half-sister?"

"It's true, you poor fool. Take the gag off Frank Austin and he'll tell you it's true. He married Rosita years ago, and Juana is his daughter. He deserted her to marry you, Mrs. Austin. That's why he didn't want you and Rosita to meet. Ask him. Frank knocked down Mendez and Mendez wanted revenge;

so he framed this marriage. Don't yuh see, he's gagged both of the parties that knew this. They'd have to watch this marriage. You poor fools, Mendez would have kept you here until after the honeymoon."

"My God, that can't be true!" said Mrs. Austin. "Sands, you are lying."

"I'm not lyin'. Take the gags out of their mouths and they'll tell you it's the truth."

So great was Sands's triumph that he grew careless, gun hanging at his side. Mendez, staking everything on one quick move, grasped a long-necked bottle from the table, and flung it square against the side of Sands's head. Sands went down like a pole-axed steer, and a moment later Mendez was again in command of the situation.

STRANGELY enough, no one seemed to care who was in command. Juana had recovered her voice, and now she said hoarsely:

"Porfiro Mendez, is it true—what Sands said?"

Mendez was the wolf now. Cheated of his prey, he was ready to rend anybody.

"Every word true!" he roared. "*Madre de Dios*, I'll keel those guards for let heem in. Every word true. But you think I'm not get even yet? *Padre!* Pardon, I forgot our *padre* 'ave no ear. Now we 'ave another wedding."

His bloodshot eyes stared at Juana, who shrank back from him.

"I no wan' you," he growled. "You marry your own brother. I marry Señorita Austin. Ha, ha, ha! That ees good. 'Er father's firs' wife was *Mejicano*; your firs' 'usband be *Mejicano*."

"No, no!" pleaded Betty. "You can't marry me. Don't!"

Mendez turned to the blank-faced

priest and made a sort of hand talk, to which the *padre* nodded violently and drew out his little book, taking his former position. Mendez stepped over in front of him, but Betty ran back, throwing herself across the bed. Mendez laughed and turned to Ricardo, owl-eyed from too much *tequila*.

"Bring her to me," he ordered.

Ricardo leaned his rifle against the wall and started across the room, very unsteady on his feet, but Hal stepped in front of him.

"Stan' back," warned Mendez, covering Hal with his six-shooter. "I jus' as soon keel you as not."

Ricardo stopped, looking inquiringly at Mendez.

"Bring her to me, Ricardo," ordered Mendez in Spanish.

"Is there no way to stop this?" Mrs. Austin moaned weakly.

As though the Deity had answered that question the roof crashed in over Mendez's head, bringing a shower of dust and plaster, a shower of heavy, broken tile, followed by a heavy body, which seemed to hurtle down, crushing Mendez to the floor and knocking the old priest sidewise under the table.

The heavy body was a man, who seemed to rise up out of the débris, staggered aside, grasping the table for support, but still holding a gun in his right hand. His face was bleeding, where it was not white from the plaster dust, but there was a grim smile on his lips.

"They didn't make these old tile roofs very strong," he said.

"Johnny Wells!" gasped Hal.

"Hyah, Hal," grinned Johnny.

"What's the good word?"

"You!" Betty came forward wonderingly. "You came through the roof!"

"Yes'm. Yuh see, I was tryin' to git

to a window up there, but them darned old tiles was kinda crinkly, and I was scared they'd hear me. Goin' mighty slow, I'll tell yuh. Wasn't takin' no chances on speed. And all to once I reckon I hit a rotten spot."

Johnny looked around the room. There was Miguel Gonzales over by the door, still doubled up from the effect of Sands's kick; Sands himself, sprawled face down; Porfiro Mendez, twisted grotesquely under the broken tile and plaster; the bald-headed old priest on hands and knees, peering from under the table, and Ricardo Gonzales, owl-eyed, hands in the air.

"It shore looks to me as though I'd ruined somebody's party," said Johnny calmly. He looked at the hole in the roof and chuckled softly.

Somewhere a door banged, a voice spoke loudly. Johnny whirled toward the door, and his gun swung menacingly.

"Been plenty hell raised here all right," said a voice.

"Goober!" yelled Johnny, and around the edge of the doorway appeared the skinny old face of Goober Glendon. Behind him was Smoky Hill, blinking over the top of Goober's old sombrero.

"Hyah, Johnny," said Goober, and they walked carefully in, guns ready.

"We're kinda late," said Smoky apologetically. "Yuh see, we had to iron them two jiggers, and then—well, if there ain't Mr. Sands! Sleepin' through all this excitement. Imagine that, will yuh?"

"Mendez knocked him down with a bottle," said Hal.

"And Mr. Mendez, all piled up nicely," grinned Smoky. "And there's Dicky Gonzales, givin' a imitation of a paper-hanger—and no paper. Well, well!"

"The picture is perfect," agreed Goober dryly. "There's a dead Injun at the main gate, a couple cripples scattered through the house—and this."

GOOBER walked over and looked at Rosita Diaz and Frank Austin.

"We better cut them rags loose," said Johnny. "I don't *sabe* the reason, but they shore look uncomfortable."

Smoky examined Sands quickly.

"Colder 'n a codfish," he said.

"Dead?" asked Hal.

"That's my impression. Saves the expense of a hangin'."

Goober and Johnny cut away the ropes and gags. Neither Rosita nor Austin was able to talk. Johnny gave Austin a drink of *tequila*, and it gagged him, but the liquor seemed to take the cramp out of his jaw muscles. Juanita was crying over her mother, who was trying to tell her that everything was all right.

"Let's have a little explanation of some kind," said Hal. "What is it all about, Smoky? Why does the death of Sands save a hanging?"

"That dirty murderer," grunted the deputy. "He murdered Terrill and Nolan. Him and Elkinson and Britton was in cahoots with Terrill and his outfit, aided by Nolan, to steal from the Star A. Nolan, as sheriff, inspected and passed on the shipments. When yore dad gave Sands a half interest, he naturally wanted to stop the rustlin', but the others refused. Don't yuh git the idea?"

"Frank Austin was on his feet, rubbing his lips and jaw. There was nothing wrong with his hearing.

"Is that true?" he whispered.

"The sheriff is takin' care of Elkinson and Britton," said Goober. "We got 'em cold."

"What a fool I've been," muttered Austin.

"Prob'ly the worst I ever seen," agreed Goober dryly. "You can be more kinds of a damn' fool in a short length of time than any man I've ever seen, Austin. How's Mendez, Johnny?"

Johnny Wells shook his head as he dusted the plaster off his knees.

"I don't reckon there's any *alcalde* in Piñon to-night, Goober. He must have been kinda brittle, because there wasn't more than forty pounds of them old tiles, and I only weigh about a hundred and seventy pounds."

"Is he—is he dead?" whispered Rosita.

"I'm sorry, but he is—yes, ma'am," replied Johnny.

Mrs. Austin had recovered some of her natural poise, and now she came to her husband; but he did not look up at her.

"Frank, is all this true?" she asked. "Did Sands tell the truth?"

"Yes, he told the truth, Laura. I—I believe I'd have sold my soul to the devil to prevent you from finding it out. It's true. Rosita Diaz is my wife. There has never been a divorce that I know about. There was a baby coming when I ran away. Why go any further? I guess I'm as bad as Sands. I don't ask anybody to forgive me. But thank God things turned out as they did. Mendez knew. He tried to black-mail me, and I struck him. This was his revenge—to force Rosita and me to watch that wedding."

Mrs. Austin shook her head sadly. "Frank, you could have told me. What misery it would have saved."

"I know. I can see that now. And like a fool I played into Sands's hands, at the sacrifice of my own son. Well, I've made a mess of things, Laura."

"It's all right, dad," said Hal bravely. "You—you just made a mistake."

"Hal, do you forgive me?"

"We've been enemies long enough, dad. We didn't know—Juana and me. As old Omaha says, it's hell, but directions says take it."

Rosita had been saying nothing, her arms around Juana. Mrs. Austin went to her and held out a hand.

"Rosita, you have been done a terrible wrong," she said. "We will see what can be done to right it."

Rosita Diaz lifted her head and smiled through her tears. "It is good for Rosita," she said huskily. "After all these years. But don't you see, it is all a mistake. That man," pointing at the crumpled body of Mendez "is my husband. I am not Rosita—I am Juanita."

"My God, what are you saying?" croaked Frank Austin.

"It is true. We looked alike. I ran away from Mendez and took refuge with Rosita. He swore to kill me. Rosita's baby was born, and she and the baby both died.

"No one knew it except her old Indian servant. I—I—God forgive me, I took her name and her home, and buried your wife, Mr. Austin, under the name of Juanita Mendez. For fifty pesos the old nurse bought the baby of a Spanish woman who was dying—that was little Juana. We kept up the deception. No one knew. It was a long time before Mendez came, and he believed Juanita dead. That is the truth, as God is my judge."

THE woman bowed her head and sobbed on Juana's shoulder, while the rest of them stood around, looking blankly at each other. Hal was the first to recover, and he

took Juana in his arms, holding her tightly.

"That marriage stands!" he shouted. "Juana, we're married!"

"Yuh better not yell," warned Johnny. "Some of that old tile might jar loose on yore head."

"He wouldn't feel it," grinned Goober, and slapped Frank Austin on the shoulder. "Go hug yore wife, you old sinner. It's all over, except cleanin' up. Give the kids yore blessin', and let's go back home."

"I—I'll do that gladly, Goober. If I ever try to prevent anythin' from now on, I hope somebody will shoot me."

"They will. Frank, and don'tcha forget it."

Goober turned and looked at Johnny, who was possibly supposed to be shaking hands with Betty; but they were holding instead of shaking, and Betty was thanking him with her eyes for what he had done.

"You must come out to the ranch," she said. "Dad needs a new foreman now, and you will like the place. Mother and I are going to stay a while. Oh, we may stay months."

"Shore," agreed Johnny heartily. "Make yore home down here with us."

"I guess I've got a foreman, Goober," said Frank.

"Looks thataway," Goober admitted.

"I'm giving the Star A to Hal, and he needs a foreman."

"Acts like he needed a keeper, too."

"He's got one. I wish you'd tell me how you discovered all these things about Sands and the other two men."

"Guessed at 'em, mostly. I didn't have a danged bit of actual proof."

"What I want to know is, where didja git that letter yuh sent in to

Sands, and what was in it," said Smoky. "My golly, it shore started things."

Goober took the letter from his pocket and handed it to Smoky, who read it aloud:

SANDS:

You try to double cross us and we'll get you cold. We don't care about your partnership with Austin. You killed Terrill, because he refused to bust up the gang, but you'll either stick with the rest of us or take what's coming to you. Two of your men robbed them Austin women and never split with us. Destroy this letter, but don't forget what I've said.

NOLAN.

"Well, no wonder you had the deadwood on 'em!" snorted Smoky. "This letter would hang the whole works. But where in the devil did you get it?"

"I wrote it a few days ago," said Goober simply. He reached in his pocket and took out the diamond ring, which he handed to Austin.

"I found that in Tony Riecho's pocket; I reckon you'll find the rest of the plunder on Britton. Him and Elkinson got shot up a little, but they confessed."

Austin shook his head slowly. "Glendon, you're a wonder."

"Well," drawled Goober, "I would not go that far—but I'm young yet."

They found the horses to transport everybody back to Indian Wells. Sands's was the only body they took back. They ignored the Gonzales brothers and the old priest, leaving the three of them together. Miguel was still suffering from the kick Sands gave him. As the last hoofbeats died in the distance, Ricardo staggered over to the table, knocked the neck off a bottle, and

poured the contents into a huge cut-glass goblet.

"'Ave dreenk, Mike," he said.

"Dreenk?" groaned Miguel. "My stummick ees outside in. *Madre de Dios*, w'at a night! Moorder, wedding, and a keek in the belly. Geeve dreenk to the *padre*."

But the *padre* was sneaking out, and Ricardo spat contemptuously, as he shifted his glance to the crumpled figure of Mendez, the candlelight flickering on the Lobo's soiled finery. He lifted the sparkling goblet high.

"W'ere you go, I do not theenk they need *alcalde*," he said softly; "but I weesh you luck, Onkle."

"Good," said Miguel heartily. "Porfiro was great man, but he bite off more than I can chew. Maybe we can be hones' men now, Ricardo."

"At leas' we can be crooked for ourself," replied Ricardo.

Up at the little depot of Indian Wells, a sleepy-eyed agent yawned as Goober Glendon wrote out a telegram to the secretary of the Cattlemen's Association, which read:

CLOSED RUSTLING DEAL TO-NIGHT AND HAVE COMPLETE CONFESSION STOP EXCUSE ME FROM TEACHING DETECTING TO ANY MORE PROMISING YOUNG MEN STOP JOHNNY WELLS WAS SHOT THROUGH THE HEART WITH AN ARROW AND THE SAD REMAINS WILL BE USED AS FOREMAN OF THE STAR A OUTFIT.

GOOBER GLENDON.

"That sounds funny," said the operator.

"It ain't," replied Goober dryly, "but you can laugh if yuh feel like it."

And he went away in the darkness, rattling his old spurs down the street.



"I lifted that ol' rifle an' banged him over dead"

The Liar Tells the Truth

Thad Heald could tell more lies to the minute than any other man in the State o' Maine—but he did more than amuse his listeners that fateful night

By HAROLD DE POLO

THE chronic laggards, accustomed to dawdle about the porch of Ben Sampson's general store and post office on East Toe Bay of Horseshoe Lake after the mail had been assorted, found a smart opportunity in the incident to twit Thad Heald—"The Liar."

Old Seth Farr, who kept a big summer boarding house, had come in to pay his bill for the entire season. He had carried his account this way for years, always appearing the morning after Labor Day and settling with actual cash. He had just handed Ben a

matter of some twelve hundred odd dollars, and as the postmaster stuffed it into a frayed wallet and jammed it into a hip pocket a loiterer winked:

"What'd *you* do with that there much money, Thad?"

"Shucks," drawled Thad, "don't take no time to think o' that. Fu'st off, I'd buy me a couple o' guns to keep you fellers from stealin' what was left off o' me."

But another wit, after the laugh had died down, saw a chance for another sally:

"If you buyed them guns, Thad,

mebbe one o' them 'u'd be a rifle that 'u'd bring down a buck some fall. Eh, boys?"

The man who was locally known as "not quite right" became aroused, for this could be taken as nothing less than a deliberate aspersion on the shooting powers of his ancient rifle—the rifle with which, it was common knowledge, he had last autumn missed a clean shot at a buck a scant ten rods away.

"Meanin' my thutty-thutty, huh?" he sputtered excitedly. "Best gun in the hull State o' Maine! W'y, that gun—"

He cut himself off, blinking, pulling thoughtfully at his ear for a moment. Then, suddenly, he went on with triumphant shrillness:

"W'y, that thutty-thutty's the only rifle here, I'll bet, that's took a moose! Yep, back two year ago, down to the lake when I was haulin' pulp, I see the critter stickin' his snoot up into a young spruce. Well, boys, I trailed him an' I trailed him, an' when I come to have a fair sight at him I raised up to knock him over. Jest as I was aimin' to pull the trigger, it comes to me suddenlike that I hadn' got mebbe more'n two-three ca'tridges. I sure 'nuff didn' have. Boys, I had one w'en I looked!"

His listeners waited as he paused. They had got The Liar to spin one of his tall tales.

"**K**NOW how good that thutty-thutty be?" Thad continued. "I follered him an' follered him, but the goin' was hard an' I couldn' seem to git close 'nuff to warrant usin' that one bullet. Begun to have pity on him, too, seein' how tired he was an' how set he was on keepin' ahead. Well, I decides to take my chances. He was standin' on a bare knoll over two

mile off, an' I lifted that ol' rifle an' banged him over dead, clean through the heart! Uh-huh, uh-huh! That's what *my* gun 'll do, boys!"

His audience stilled their snickers of amusement, for one of the baiters had winked, implying he held another card up his sleeve:

"Fine thing for you to do, Thad, bein' a licensed guide. Ain't been 'lowed to kill moose in Maine for years, an'—"

"Who said 'twas in Maine?" Thad asked blandly. "Chased him clear across the Noo Brunswick border."

"Nice hikin'," opined Ben. "Ain't more'n two hundred miles to the border."

"Didn' say which lake I'd started from, did I?" queried The Liar. "Ain't givin' all *my* good huntin' spots away, I ain't!"

"Better be careful tellin' that story, Thad," another warned. "I guess us fellers is all right, but some stranger might tell them Noo Brunswick authorities you killed him without a huntin' license."

"Reason I shot him when I did," came back Thad instantly, "wa'n't only 'cause I pitied him for bein' tired. I'd stopped an' got a Noo Brunswick license, I had, whilst Mr. Moose was restin'. He was veerin' off to'ard the *Quee*-bec line, though, an' I was afraid I'd have to git me another license there. Costin' what they do—"

The laugh that went up, now, was not on Thad; it was with him. There was no tripping him to-day.

No one tried to, any more, for as a canoe came out from behind a rocky promontory Thad had turned and waved to the occupant.

"'Lo, John!"

"'Lo, Thad!"

"Mite too late, John," called out the

postmaster, Ben Sampson. "Thad was tellin' a beaut'. Best moose story I ever heard."

"Maybe he'll spin it to me later," smiled John Crosby, a summer resident who was extremely popular with the natives. "Came over to ask you to give me a hand closing up camp, Thad," he added, sending his craft toward the store wharf with a deft stroke of his paddle.

"Waitin' for you," said Thad. "Let's go!"

THAD and Crosby, using their paddles with the stroke that strove for wasting no energy instead of the attaining of grace, instinctively eased up as they rounded that rocky promontory. They always did, when they traveled this way. Below them, half a mile away and perhaps a third of that distance from the land, John Crosby's island stood out, a gay green spot in the rippling of the September water. Slim white birches and tall dark pines dotted the island, and Crosby loved his camp so much that he always liked to approach it slowly from this direction. The view, with the purple mountains as a background, could not be beat, he had often said.

"Beautiful, eh, Thad?" he mused, a trifle sadly.

"Awful pretty, John," admitted The Liar.

Thad then began one of his impossibly exaggerated stories, and spun it colorfully until they reached the island. Once there, they were too busy for much talk, performing the various duties necessary in closing a camp against the winter.

They had to shovel the sawdust from the ice-house and into the adjoining lean-to, ready for filling when the

lake would have thirty or more inches of ice on it; they sprinkled the mattresses with pepper, so the red squirrels that might gain an entrance would be repulsed; they locked the pillows and blankets in a huge box made for that purpose, for prying mice fancy feathers and wool; they executed, in fact, all the innumerable tasks, seemingly so trivial, that are nevertheless so essential. When they finished, the sun had gone down, and they went to the kitchen to forage a meal.

Crosby, throughout the meal, had appeared preoccupied. He had been that way, also, when they had been working about the camp. It was plain that Thad had noticed it, for he was furtively glancing at his friend with a worried expression in his eyes.

They finished supper, presently, and The Liar spoke with happy eagerness: "Time to go fishin', eh, John?"

John Crosby smiled—a wry smile—and shook his head:

"Sorry, Thad, but I can't make it to-night. I—"

"You—you can't make it to-night, John?"

Thad astoundedly got out his words, his face lengthening so that his lower jaw drooped. Ever since their friendship, which had begun when the young Boston architect had first purchased his camp up here some four seasons back, this last night together had been almost sacred. They went out shortly after dark, and stayed until the sun pushed its way up from behind the lower hills in the east. Bass casting was their mutual hobby, and they sallied forth whether the night was good or bad. It had become a ritual with them.

"No... No, Thad," said Crosby, after a moment, his voice more firm, the shake of his head more decisive. "Sorry—damned sorry—but I really

have some work to do. Some—oh, some of those hanged blue prints for—”

But Thad had risen.

“Sure, sure! I—I understan’, John! Yep, I understan’, John!”

His face, as he spoke, showed that he was telling the biggest and most palpable lie he had ever uttered in his life. It was plain, from his eyes that looked as if he was suffering acute pain, that he could not understand how blue prints, or anything—how God, almost—could make John give up this night to which they both always looked forward all season.

He began prattling wildly and confusedly, in order to hide his own confusion, as they cleared up the table and washed the pans and dishes. When they had finished, Crosby spoke, trying to sound cheerful:

“Paddle you back to the landing, Thad. It will give me a bit of exercise before I get to work. See you at Ben’s in the morning, when I catch the stage for the station. You can take the canoe home with you, then, if you don’t mind, and stick her away for the winter. I—oh, well, next year’s coming, Thad. Be up early, I hope, and we’ll make up for this night we missed!”

“Sure—sure, John,” was about all that The Liar could say.

THAD HEALD figured in more excitement, that night, than if he had gone off on a fishing jaunt with Crosby—figured in more excitement, indeed, and told what is now known as his most stupid, his most immensely ludicrous lie of all time.

Ben Sampson, a trifle after eleven, had heard a noise on his porch. It was a stealthy noise, at first, and then it had suddenly become an exceedingly loud

one, as if a man had tripped over something in the dark. For all his generous build, Ben was a remarkably rapid person in action. Anyway, not later than eight or ten seconds after he had heard the sound, he said, he was leaping down the stairs and through the store with a shotgun in his hands. In another second or two, he was leveling his weapon at a figure down on the wharf, trying to scramble into a canoe.

“Git back onto that wharf or I’ll shoot,” he cried. Then he added, sending his voice in the direction of the nearest house, occupied by the Damon brothers: “Hi, Luke! Hi, Art! Got a thief here. Come give a hand—might be more’n one. Step right smart! An’ stay there on that wharf, you, an’ raise your hands up over your head!”

As a light appeared in the next house, that figure on the wharf shrieked out in the piercing tones used by Thad Heald whenever he became worked up about a thing:

“You *ain’t* got the thief, Ben Sampson. You ain’t got the thief that broke in your store an’ busted that dinky desk top an’ took the twelve hundred ’n’ more dollars ol’ Seth Farr give you this morning. I—it was Crosby—it *was John Crosby*,” Thad rushed on wildly. “I saw him come in his canoe; I saw him leave here in it. I was jest startin’ t’ chase him, I— He jest went ’round the ledge, I tell you, in his canoe. Hurry an’ bring a flash light an’ we can get him boys. If we don’t hurry, he’ll land some’eres ’round the point an’ scurry off. Yep; he’ll hide out, then, or run up along the shore through the woods an’ swim to his islan’ before we can— Bring that flash, Luke. I’m tellin’ you Crosby—”

The Damon boys had by now run up. One held a lantern, the other a

flash light, and the spot of the latter was turned on Thad. He stood there, his wide face an odd mixture of emotions, holding his arms above his head and clutching his pipe grimly in the fingers of his left hand. He was shrieking, almost hysterically:

"Yes, sirree, it was John Crosby, I'm tellin' you. I saw him do it, an' I saw him go 'round the ledge in his canoe. I'll bet he's heard us, by now, an' that he's made the shore an' is swimmin' to his camp. Yep, I'll bet we'll never get him, after this. He's prob'ly heard all we're sayin', too, an' jest so's we can't prove nuthin on him he's mos' likely left the money in the canoe an' skipped—yessir, *if he leaves the money in the canoe we can't prove nothin'!* Here, give me that flash li—"

Thad, well-nigh in hysterics, made a lunge for the flash light. His fingers, taking the Damon boy by surprise, gripped it—but as Thad pulled it away he stumbled, fell, and the light went out.

"Oh, gosh, I broke the bulb! Now we can't see so well, with that lantern, *an' Crosby's left that money in the canoe, all right, an' he's had time to—*"

"Quiet that crazy talk, Thad!"

Ben Sampson had spoken, his usually genial face verging on sternness. His mind, like his body, had the faculty of behaving surprisingly quick when the occasion demanded.

"DUNNO what this joke be, Thad, but it's a mighty crazy one,"

Sampson went on. "Been thinkin' it all over. If you only see John comin' out o' the store, how be it you happen t' know the door's been busted, 'r the desk opened, 'r the money gone?" He shook his head. "No, Thad, you played this joke—if that's

what you call it—pretty poor. *You* opened up that door an' desk an' took the money—prob'ly borrowin' John's canoe fu'st, in case things went wrong—an' then it strikes me you forgot your pipe an' come back to get it so's you wouldn't leave no evidence ag'in' yourself. Then you tripped. It's a plumb giv'way, Thad, an' it's goin' a mite too far for a joke. Dunno's I better call—"

"Ain't you comin' up an' let me prove I'm right?" cried The Liar. "The money, I tell you, is in that ca . . ."

"Most likely is, just where you put it," cut in Ben calmly. "Sure, we'll go up. Want t' git my money back, I do. Hop in, Thad."

They paddled up along the shore, Ben and Thad and the Damon brothers. Thad, all the while, kept getting more excited, more vague, more ridiculous in his assertions. At last, too, they found the canoe—found it perhaps a couple of hundred feet up the lake from the ledge—with the money in the envelope, as Seth Farr had handed it to Ben Sampson, lying on the bottom.

"See? See?" gasped Thad Heald. "Didn't I—"

But Ben Sampson, this time, merely had to hold up his hand in order to obtain attention. He spoke gravely:

"Thad, you sure have told some whoppers in your time, but you sure went an' outdid an' overreached yourself when you come to accusin' John Crosby o' bein' a thief!"

"Didn't I always tell you, though, that some day you'd be robbed?" Thad said foolishly, as if still stumbling around mentally. "Jest this very mornin', remember, I said—"

But then Thad stopped, stuttered, looked wildly about. Then, as he low-

ered his head, his voice came in a childish whine:

"Aw, Ben, a joke's a joke! I—I—"

"I know it be, 'Thad, an' that's the way I'm goin' to take it," Ben said, with a mixture of kindness and sternness. "Got my money back, leastwise, so no real harm's been done. After this, 'Thad, don't go so dummed far when you feel like playin' tricks. 'Member that, 'Thad?"

"Aw, Ben—"

"That's all right, 'Thad," the storekeeper cut in, using a tone of dignified finality. "Might's well be gettin' back, now."

TWO hours or more later, after things had quieted down and 'Thad had presumably gone home for the night, he was over at the camp on John Crosby's island.

Sitting there in the living room before the fireplace, with his wide ears and eyes and mouth seeming to droop in sympathy and understanding, 'Thad silently listened while the young architect desperately mumbled out his story.

Crosby had—he confessed—gone mad. Insane with worry. Things had been going very badly, for the past year. Missing out by cruelly scant margins on job after job; finding difficulty in collecting bills; having one big firm, whose account alone would have put him on his feet, go into bankruptcy. The ghastly run of hard luck, in fact, that occasionally visits a man in his profession.

He had one sure thing ahead, yet it would be six months before he could draw a penny. His prestige, he knew, would have been ruined had he asked for an advance. In the meantime, he had not known which way to turn. He had mortgaged the island and camp in the spring, up to the hilt, he explained,

and he had even sold his car and other personal possessions. He had stayed up here all summer, had given up his offices, in order to save money. He had been working hard on his big job, but there was still six months of it ahead of him, with no cash in sight on which to exist.

As he had been paddling to the store that morning, he had heard the remarks about the twelve-hundred-odd dollars that Seth Farr had paid to Ben Sampson. It was then that he must have gone crazy, for he had suddenly formed his plan to steal it. He could not understand it, now that everything was over. He had never done an unclean thing in his life, he swore. When he had thought of that money there in the desk, so easy to get, his brain must have turned. The sum would have tided him over, and of course he would have paid it back when he got on his feet. 'Thad *knew* that, didn't he? 'Thad didn't think he was a crook, did—

"Shucks," interrupted 'Thad, "don't go to worryin', John. You ain't done nuthin'. You'd 'a' gave it back. Still, it might 'a' been hard—awkward-like, like you put it—so that's why I done what I done!"

"But it isn't right to let you take the blame," cried Crosby with heat. "I've got to go and explain to Ben; to make a clean breast of it!"

'Thad shook his head slowly, and pulled at an ear, and smiled his whimsical smile.

"Plain foolish, that 'u'd be, John. All settled already as bein' a joke o' mine!"

"But it isn't right! It—"

"Only thing wa'n't right, John, was you not comin' to me for the money. 'Not quite right,' the boys say I be, but I got two, three thousan' put by, from my guidin'. Aim to make you

take half o' it, afore you leave, too. Best frien' I got, ain't you, John?"

"I AM your friend, and you're mine, Thad. I—well, perhaps I will accept a loan. But—but I ought to take my medicine and tell the truth to Ben," Crosby finished fiercely.

"Hanker to make a *liar* out o' me?" drawled Thad quietly, and even in his distress John was forced to smile.

"No," Thad went on. "I done a heap o' thinkin', w'en I left you after supper. Thought you was in some trouble, an' I went an' got my own canoe to go an' ask you what it were. Jest as I started, I see your canoe glidin' up to the store wharf. Well, to make a long story short, I see everything you done. All to oncè my plan come to me. I got to the shore an' waited till you was near that ledge afore I made the rumpus. Figgered you'd hear the soun' an' make for shore; figgered, too, you'd hear my words; figgered you'd know them words, accusin' myself, was said for

you to hear; figgered, o' course, that w'en you did hear 'em you'd come to your senses; figgered you'd leave that money in the canoe, like I mentioned, an' skin off through the woods an' swim back here to the islan'! I—well, I had to do it, John, 'cause I knowed it 'u'd be less awkwardlike. You'd 'a' woke up, later, an' give back that money, an' then they'd all 'a' knowed—"

"But they should know, Thad," cut in Crosby his hand going out and gripping that of the man who was "not quite right."

Thad sighed and smiled his whimsical smile.

"Ain't I told you, John, that it's all settled an' took for jest a joke o' mine? 'Sides, you wouldn' want to go an' make a liar out o' me, like I said, would you? You see, John, all my life I been savin' up the truth for the time it 'u'd be needed bad to be took for a lie. I—w'y, John, you'd jest *ruin* me with Ben an' the rest o' the boys did you go an' tell 'em the truth!"

THE END.



Wandering Waterspouts

THOSE awe-inspiring travelers of the tropics, funnel-shaped columns of water and cloud moving in erratic courses over their native element, are unwelcome guests when they come inland. For then the waterspouts become cyclones with all their attendant destruction.

Recently, two of these sea wanderers invaded the more or less peaceful suburbs of Los Angeles and left a trail of destruction in their wake. Occasionally, waterspouts are observed off the California coast, but old inhabitants failed to recall any previous visits inland. Factories and dwellings were unroofed, standing motor cars moved from place to place and wrecked, unoffending citizens whisked up bodily and set down again—not too gently; and last, but not least, one surprised suburban citizen was horrified to find a well-grown octopus in possession of his front lawn.

Of course, in California, stray waterspouts—like other vagaries of climate—are unusual and are not to be considered as permanent liabilities.

Charles B. Dean.

The Men Who Make The Argosy



JOHN A. THOMPSON

Author of "*They's a Train Comin',*"
"*Evidence,*" "*Sky Birds,*" etc.

IN response to a cry for autobiographical data, here goes: Born—yes. Age—just try and find out. Color—white. Eyes—two. Complexion—sunset. Identification marks—none.

Spent my sixteenth birthday prospecting twenty-three miles out of Nome, Alaska. One member of the outfit walked to town the night before and packed out two cases of beer on his back. Chilled it with snow and had it for the birthday supper. Chewed tobacco in those unregenerate days and could hit same spot on the Yukon stove from three positions, viz.: standing at seven paces, seated on a case of canned goods, or lying prone in my bunk (upper bunk). Drove dogs that winter. Very cold.

Landed in Central America trying to get warm. Walked across the banana republics from east to west coast and *vice versa*. Beautiful country. Fired a locomotive on a dinky banana railroad. Mined. Returned to the United States. Wandered over the West.

Came East and there being a war going on joined the Navy in April, 1917. Soon carrying T.N.T. and mines across the pond for ultimate deposition on the bottom of the North Sea. War record neat, but not gaudy. No excitement to speak of.

South America. Nice place. More ships. Back to the States. Took a whack at college, saw what made the wheels go round and left after one year. Taught school. Made a trip from New London, Connecticut, to Bermuda in a forty-three-foot yawl, all sail, no motor. Returned in same craft and went to work on a New York newspaper. Covered courts, fires, murders, floods, disasters of every description, dog-shows, gang killings, kidnappings, industrial strikes, divorce cases, other dirt in high life, parades, local politics and what have you?



Having led the demon work a merry chase for more years than I care to admit, it finally caught up with me. The newspaper game was my downfall. In getting out of it I hopped from the frying pan into the fire. Started writing stories, which I would rather do than anything else.

More statistics. Height—five feet nine inches, or six feet four inches with a derby on. Never wear derbies. Weight—one hundred and ninety-eight pounds, which is too much, but who cares? Favorite heroes—editors who buy my stuff. People I dislike—editors who don't, and writers who get high-hat or think they are any better than any other working man.

Oh, yes, and what I am most proud of—My home town: New York.



Argonotes.

The Readers' Viewpoint



ONE of our lady fans speaks her preference:

Ventnor, Atlantic City, N. J.

I have never before written to you, but at last I have decided that I want to "say my say."

I have read your magazine since I was a child and I am still at it. I have enjoyed each story immensely and I feel so enthusiastic over the stories of your many authors that I feel like sending a personal message to each one. As, for instance, to Mr. Fred MacIsaac, "Your stories can't be beat," and to Mr. Edgar Franklin, "neither can yours!" That certainly is impartial, is it not? But I do enjoy the stories of each. There are many others that I would like to congratulate, too. Ralph Milne Farley and Joseph Ivers Lawrence (I surely did enjoy "The Master of Airlie," and have just finished "Java Blend," and both were great). Please let us have much more of *John Peyton*. I hope the stories of him won't be discontinued just because he married in "Java Blend." Most authors seem to think that their characters are done for when they get married, except perhaps the originator of *Gillian Hazeltine*. He is still popular with me, even if he did get married to a red-head.

I am now enjoying "The Wrong Kind of Money," by MacIsaac, and in this week's issue there is a new one that is starting off very good and already is gripping. That is "Voodoo'd," by Kenneth Perkins. I hope that it keeps as good as it is starting, but I am sure we can depend on Perkins for that. And the little "fact" columns at the end of each story are splendid for first-hand information. Minna Irving certainly can find unusual things to tell about, and Theodore Roscoe seems to be quite familiar with the East.

Speaking of the East, do you recall publishing a letter from a young chap serving with the British army in India? I do not wish to mention his name. He wrote to you and also expressed his appreciation of your fine stories, and mentioned that the *ARGOSY* was sent to him by a friend each week. I have the pleasure of being that friend, so you can see to what distant climes a good magazine will travel. He was later transferred

to Egypt and while there he continued to receive it, and now he is back in England, and is a confirmed *ARGOSY* fan.

Just a few more words. Where is *Madame Storey* and *Bella*? I always look at *Looking Ahead* at the end of the *ARGOSY* and fail to see any announcement of the future publishing of one of Hulbert Footner's unbeatable *Madame Storey* novels or novelettes. Please have Mr. Footner write some more of them, for they do hold the interest. I have read several letters in the Readers' Viewpoint that knock them, but don't forget, there are many that do like them a lot.

In our family, we have solved the weekly problem, "Where's my *ARGOSY*?" We each buy one, so there are always three or four around the house each *ARGOSY* day. There is much more I would like to say, but I have exceeded the limit already, so just wait, I will be writing again soon, and say the rest then.

So, to the *ARGOSY*, success and a long life.

FRANCES LEAGUE.

AND now one of the gentlemen:

Pittsburgh, Pa.

I have just finished a few of the latest stories and wish to congratulate you and your writers. You know your stuff! "The Man in the Jade Mask," "The Death Watch," and "The Death Spell of Nong Chik" sure hit the spot. Loring Brent, Theodore Roscoe, W. Wirt, and Fred MacIsaac keep me spending the dime weekly. Your covers make my imagination run riot. The choice of stories varies, but I like Oriental, impossible, and mysteries the best. I do not read the Westerns.

Let's have more of the type of the above. Keep the good work up.

STEVE YARNOT.

A SOMEWHAT unusual way of grading an issue is this:

Jersey City, N. J.

Am taking the liberty of writing regarding your issue of May 10, 1930. I rate the stories therein as follows, classifying as one hundred per cent such stories as the *Solomon* series,

"The Mental Marvel," "A Great Man's Shoes," Foreign Legion variety (not Wirt):

percent

"In the Reign of King Ben"	75
"The Death Spell of Nong Chik"	70
"Java Blend"	65
"Voodoo'd"	50
"Stormalong Pays a Debt"	50
"Two Crooks and a Career"	50
"The Hunted"	20
"The Wrong Kind of Money"	0

(I dislike these stories, as well as the scientific variety: "The Storm that Had to be Stopped.")

Of course, for the price your magazine is well worth the money. Give us some more of A. Merritt by all means. His "Moon Pool" and "Seven Footprints to Satan" were fine.

Couldn't you give us some more underworld stories? Stories like Balzac's "Wild Ass's Skin" (movieized, I believe), etc., should be entertaining. I believe the unusual stories draw best—although undoubtedly more costly. I believe your magazine has dropped in interest, lately. This may be due to the financial end of it. To keep up the high stride steadily must be costly.

But your magazine is fine for the money, and you can count on me as a steady reader.

L. C. AUER.

ANOTHER Theodore Roscoe enthusiast:

Winfield, Tenn.

I have been reading ARGOSY and *Argosy-All-story* for about ten years and have had no cause to complain, except when I missed a copy. I would rather miss three meals than a copy of ARGOSY.

I have been reading "Argonotes" for some time. The only thing wrong with it is too many readers complaining. What do they expect for a dime?

Theodore Roscoe is my favorite among your many good writers.

Always for ARGOSY,

HEARSTLE CREEK MORE.

ROBERT CARSE seems to lead this reader's list of favorites:

Glendale, Cal.

I began reading the ARGOSY in February, 1930, and I have not missed a copy since nor expect to in the future. Your magazine has the best variety of writers that are on the market to-day.

There was a new writer in one of your magazines published in the last of February

that is a real writer of French Foreign Legion stories. His story, called "Man Size," had such powerful drama that it moved me as no other story has done. I rate it as the best short story serial I have ever read. By all means have more of his stories.

My favorite authors are in the following order of their importance to me: Theodore Roscoe, Bedford-Jones, Charles Alden Seltzer, Fred MacIsaac, Ray Cummings, Lieut. John Hopper, A. Leslie, Ralph Milne Farley, J. E. Grinstead, W. Wirt, R. de S. Horn, George Ogden, Don McGrew, Joseph Ivers Lawrence, Erle Stanley Gardner, Courtney Ryley Cooper, John H. Thompson, and others that are also very good writers. I forgot to mention Robert Carse, Loring Brent, and Otis Adelbert Kline who are up on the top, to my estimation, next to Theodore Roscoe.

Some of the best stories I have ever read are: "The Blue Cat of Buddha," By Theodore Roscoe; "Gone North," by Seltzer; "In the Reign of King Ben," by J. E. Grinstead; "Six-gun Railroad," by A. Leslie; "John Solomon's Biggest Game," By Bedford-Jones; "A Great Man's Shoes," by Fred MacIsaac; "Island of the Damned," by R. de S. Horn; "The City of Japheth," by W. Wirt; "Alexander the Red," by Don McGrew; "Maza of the Moon," by Otis Adelbert Kline; "Radio Gun-Runners," by Ralph Milne Farley. The three outstanding stories of this year are: "The Death Watch," by Theodore Roscoe; "Maza of the Moon," by Otis Kline, and "Man Size," by Robert Carse.

Three cheers for the ARGOSY. It is the best magazine on the stands with its variety of swell writers as it is.

JOHN HOPPER.

AALEXANDER the Red" and "Island of the Damned" both scored with this reader:

San Anselmo, Cal.

Congratulations! The stories in ARGOSY for the last few months have certainly been excellent, especially the serials and novelettes. Why, they couldn't be better!

Don McGrew is to be complimented on his story, "Alexander the Red." For a novel of historic value, it rates higher than any other published in ARGOSY, with the exception of "Cyrano," by H. Bedford-Jones. As a story of adventure and love in perilous times, it surpasses any historic novel I have read, and I've read quite a few. By all means, let us have another tale from the pen of Don McGrew in the near future.

"Island of the Damned" is another serial that is making the ARGOSY the excellent maga-

zine that it is to-day. "The Golden Traitor," by the same author, R. de S. Horn, does not compare with his latest work. Mr. Horn's descriptions of the characters in the story are fine, as is also his ability to keep the narrative suspense to make the story the thrilling one that it is.

Best wishes for ARGOSY, the greatest fiction magazine that there is. May it continue with more serials of such excellence as the two thrilling and instructive tales mentioned above.

LLOYD KRELLE.

CHALK up another for Don McGrew:

Los Angeles, Cal.

I note that in your department called "Argonotes" none of your correspondents in the issue of April 19 mention the creator of "Alexander the Red," Mr. Don McGrew, so I am doing this which I have never done before—bothered to inform an editor of an opinion. And while I am not addicted to ARGOSY or other current fiction, the opinion is—that this writer is splendid, fortified by genuine historical facts, and skillful. Another of his researches would compensate for the mildewed Western and underworld rot.

F. J. BOYLE.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Name _____

Street _____

City _____ State _____

7-19



Looking Ahead!

Fred MacIsaac

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Bob Cross

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in the Sky
by
L. C. Davis

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Max Brand

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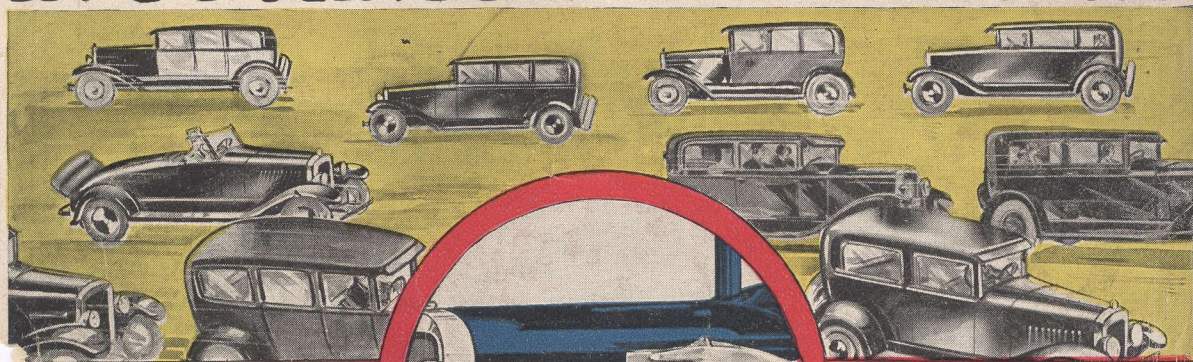
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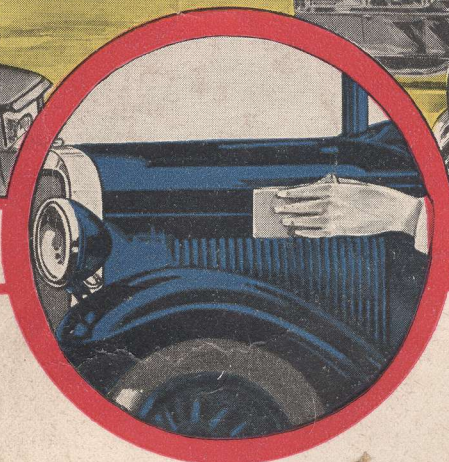


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